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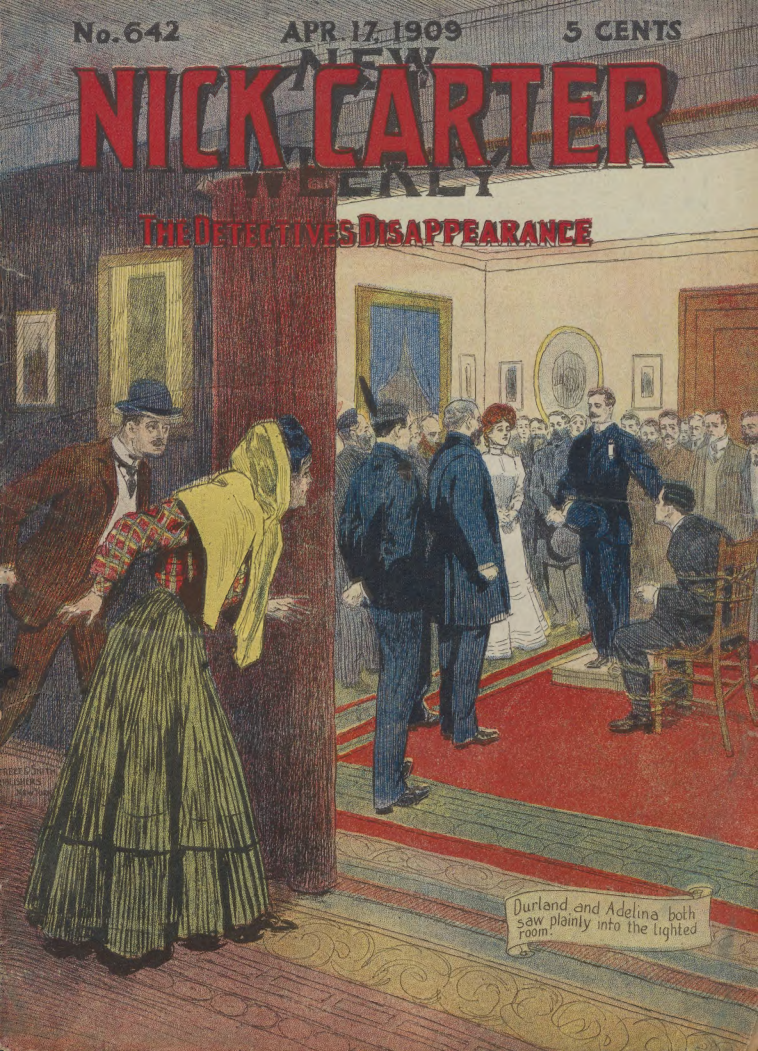
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE DETECTIVE'S DISAPPEARANCE



NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE DETECTIVE'S DISAPPEARANCE;

OR,

NICK CARTER IS SAVED BY ADELINA.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER IN PERIL.

There was a blinding flash, a loud report, a stifling mass of pungent smoke filled the room instantly. Nick Carter felt a sense of suffocation, and the fumes he breathed choked him and stung his nostrils and throat in a manner that was most irritating.

He reached out his hands and groped blindly for something to which to cling. He heard muttered exclamations of rage and fright, around him, and knew that they proceeded from the officers whom his friend Conroy Conner had guided to that room.

Then he heard the voice of Patsy, speaking at one side of him, and the voice of Chick at the other, and he knew that no matter what had happened, his two assistants were not injured; also that he had received no sort of hurt himself.

A word, now, as to the conditions which had brought about the scene described.

The detective had been for some time on the track of a set of conspirators who were plotting against the peace of South America; that is, certain revolutionists of the several South American countries had gotten together, and formed a congress, and out of it all had grown the "Great Conspiracy," which now, for a considerable time, had interested Nick Carter.

His services had been engaged by one General Ignacio Revuelta, who represented the governments that were conspired against, and the detective's duties consisted only in heading off the conspiracy, before it could assume such proportions as to threaten the peace of all South America.

Nick had discovered that the head and front of the conspiracy, a man named Don José Carerra had made himself prominent; but not so prominent, indeed, as his beautiful daughter, Carmen by name; and it soon appeared that Carmen was the one whose ambitions really kept the movement alive and rendered it dangerous.

There had been several coincidences, which happened at the beginning of Nick Carter's interest in the case, which had been almost fateful. Several things had worked together, and had pointed an accusing finger toward one point, the conspiracy. A mention of them will not be amiss in putting the reader thoroughly in touch with the incidents which made this story possible.

The case might be said to have begun with Patsy.

He had been seated in the tonneau of Nick Carter's

automobile, near the Eighth Avenue and Fifty-ninth street entrance to Central Park, one forenoon, when his attention was attracted by the strange actions of some men who approached the iron fence which surrounds the statue of Columbus, from time to time, and made chalk marks against it.

At first, he noticed them in that careless manner with which one sees what is going on around one and yet pays no attention to it; then he was attracted more particularly, when the men continued to appear and make their marks, so to speak; and, at last, when one of the men made a red mark, instead of a white one, he became so interested in the affair that he left the motor-car, and, telling Danny, the chauffeur, not to wait for him, went toward the statue, to discover what it was all about.

To do this he purchased some chalk at a store; and because two colors besides the white crayon were displayed to him, he purchased them all; that is, a piece of blue crayon, as well as the white, and the red.

A little later, he made a white mark upon the fence; then he did as he had seen the other men do; that is, he walked slowly down Eighth Avenue.

In doing so he was presently accosted by a man, who handed him an envelope which contained merely instructions that he was to show himself at the corner of Twenty-sixth Street and Madison Avenue, at half past three, that afternoon.

Interested still more than he had been before, he returned to the statue now, and made a red mark on the fence, and then again he strolled down the avenue.

This time he was accosted by a different man entirely, who handed to him another envelope. It was sealed, this time, and when he was about to break the seal, to open and read what it contained, it was grasped out of his hand—by the man who had delivered the first envelope to him.

Patsy had not fancied this summary method of dealing, and had seized the man by the wrist, and in doing so had dropped the piece of *blue* chalk upon the pavement, where it broke, and scattered.

But the mere sight of the blue chalk had had an most salutary effect upon the stranger, for, instantly, his manner became respectful, he apologized for what he had done, and at once took his departure.

Wondering still more at the strange effect produced by the several chalk marks, Patsy had stepped inside a store to read what the message contained, and had found there merely directions for him to appear under the arch at Washington Square, at 8:30, that same evening. Then, a moment later, while standing over the smudge of blue, made by the chalk that had been crushed beneath the feet of people on the street, he had been addressed by a veiled woman.

The conversation which followed need not be repeated here; but the woman discovered, by Patsy's remarks, that he was an interloper; and the result of it was that Patsy was followed when he finally took his departure; in Madison Square he was later attacked, forced into a hack, and so abducted. Still later, Nick Carter, in passing that way, found Patsy's jeweled match-box lying in the gutter, and knowing that Patsy would not readily have parted with it, began an investigation which led him, presently, to a bench in the Square, upon which three men were seated.

One of these proved to be an educated man, whom adversity and ill luck had changed to an adventurer. He had seen the attack upon Patsy, and told the detective about it; he had also been one of the men who had made the chalk marks on the fence around the statue; and it was because of Nick Carter's talk with this man, Jack Durland by name, that the detective had finally arrived at the conclusion that the disappearance of Patsy was due to the workings of that very same secret organization against which he had already accepted a retainer.

Durland was readily induced to assist Nick in the case, and presently Patsy was rescued from the power of the conspirators.

He was found at a residence along Riverside Drive; and there, also, the detective and Durland met and talked with Carmen Carerra, the queen of the conspirators, and the would-be ruler of the great empire that was to be created to succeed the existing governments of South America.

Carmen Carerra was not only possessed of extraordinary beauty; she was, also, by nature, a siren. She was endowed with wit and skill, beyond her years, and the usual powers of her sex, and Jack Durland instantly fell madly in love with her; and she, being ambitious, and recognizing in Durland a man who could aid her greatly in her plans, had, to a certain extent, returned his passion.

The result of it was that he foreswore his allegiance to Nick Carter, and joined the conspiracy; then he plotted with Carmen to get Nick Carter out of the way, so that he could not destroy the purposes of the conspiracy; a trap was laid for Nick and his assistants, with the result that Nick, Chick, Patsy, and Danny were all captured, by men employed by Carmen, at a house to which they were enticed.

From that house the three—for Danny was not in-

cluded in this affair—were taken to a warehouse along the river-front, where a meeting of the conspirators had been arranged, and there Nick and the others were told that they could choose between taking an oath of allegiance to the cause of the conspiracy, or being shot.

But Nick Carter had suspected the trap that was laid for him, and he had prepared for it.

He had sent a message to his friend Conroy Conner, who was temporarily in the city, telling him to go to that house, where Nick was invited, and to watch it; also a second letter, of the same sort, had been sent to the commissioner of police.

The result of those two letters was, that at the very moment when Nick, and Chick, and Patsy were condemned to death, the entrance to the great room in the warehouse where the meeting was in session, was broken down, and Conner rushed into the room, followed by a score or more of blue-coated officers.

A thrilling scene had taken place, when the policemen broke into the room.

Durland, reminded of his own weakness in going back on Nick Carter, had just denounced the woman he loved, and had shouted out that if those men were to die, he would die with them; Carmen had held out her hands appealingly to the man she loved, and he had turned his back upon her—then the door was broken down, and the policemen, led by Conner, rushed into the room.

Conner went at once to Nick Carter. He demanded of Carmen the keys to the irons that locked the wrists of the three prisoners, and he had just set Nick and his assistants free, when the scene which is described in the first paragraph of this chapter was enacted.*

Just before the explosion happened, whatever might have caused it, Nick had been standing beside Conner, facing the platform upon which Carmen Carerra, with her father, and others, had been seated; Durland had been standing at Nick's right; he had just turned his back upon Carmen, in reply to a last appeal from her; Chick and Patsy were only a few feet distant; the blue-coated officers were lined up near the entrance, debarring all exit from the room; and more than sixty of the conspirators were gathered there; then the flash, the noise, the pungent smoke, the sense of suffocation, and the panic which is apt to come to many persons on such an occasion.

The room had been lighted, although not brightly, and none of the lights had been extinguished; but now, with the dense smoke caused by the explosion these lights were mere blurs through the opaqueness of the atmosphere.

Nothing could be seen at all, save only the shadowy outlines of forms near at hand. The air, if air it could be called, was stifling.

"Guard the doorway!" shouted the detective, within a few seconds after the explosion occurred. "Let no one pass out, no matter what happens!"

But his orders fell upon unheeding ears.

Men will not take chances of suffocation, and the coughing and sneezing, the shouts and the cries that filled the room told only too well that all were more or less frightened.

Nick Carter realized instantly that he could not depend upon the policemen to guard the door, just then, and he started forward toward the platform upon which he had last seen Carmen standing, with her arms outstretched toward Jack Durland.

"Chick! Patsy! Conner! Where are you?" he called through the smoke.

"Here!" and "Here!" and "Here!" The answers were quite near to him.

"To the platform!" he called again. "Get Don José, and the woman, if you can!"

He had reached the edge of it himself by that time, and was groping with his hands, in the effort to find the woman, when he received a stunning blow on his head, which sent him reeling backward into the arms of another person whom he did not know.

*For a full history of the incidents referred to, see Nos. 640 and 641 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, where they are more particularly described.

CHAPTER II.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NICK CARTER.

Conner, whom the readers of Nick Carter histories will remember, as connected with the government secret service at Washington, and in whom they will recall an old friend and sometime assistant of Nick's, did not give immediate attention to the order uttered by the detective.

Instead, Conner realized that little could be accomplished in that room, so long as the smoke remained as dense as it was, rendering it difficult to breathe, and effectually handicapping the officers, and preventing them from doing their best work.

Conner had observed what sort of building it was he had entered, before the descent was made. He knew that the windows were shuttered with iron blinds,

and that, doubtless, they would open readily enough from the inside; and accordingly, instead of complying with the detective's order—he knew that Chick and Patsy would obey, and thought that he would not be needed—he called aloud to two of the officers whom he knew by name, and then he started toward the windows.

But they did not fly open at his touch, as he had hoped they might do; they had, in fact, been securely fastened by the conspirators when that place was selected as a rendezvous; and it was some time before Conner could force the first one he attacked.

But a rush of cool night air came into the room at the instant the shutter was thrown ajar, and it revived not only the strength, but also the spirits of those who were there in the smoke.

A second window gave way to their efforts; then, a third one; and presently the men began to breathe freely again, and to see, as well.

It has been said that the lights were not extinguished; and now when the smoke began to escape from its confined space, and the air grew clearer, these lights dispelled the gloom, and those who were left in the place began to see things more clearly.

The expression "Those who were left in the place" is used advisedly, for it needed but a glance to determine that the conspirators, almost to the last man among them, had found a way to escape already. They had disappeared.

There had been threescore of them, not counting Carmen Carerra; now only three were remaining; the others had disappeared.

Nor was it difficult to determine in what manner they had made their escape.

There, where the platform had been, was now the open way.

The platform had been raised bodily from its resting-place, and beneath where it had been, a large, square opening in the floor demonstrated the fact that a way of escape had been prepared by the conspirators for just such an occasion as this.

A short flight of rude steps led downward into the hole, which extended only beyond the brick partition that was located just back of it; there it gave out, again, into another warehouse; and from there, exit was easy to the streets of the city.

And there had been ample time for the men to get away.

Patsy and Chick were the first to leap into the opening, and to explore it. Conner was not far in the rear; but when they at last reached the street, the thoroughfare was as clear of persons as it ever is; certainly there was no person in sight who might be arrested as a conspirator, or as one who had threatened Nick Carter with death.

Two of the officers had followed Conner and the two assistants through the opening; and now one of them remarked:

"Where is Mr. Carter?"

Until that instant Conner had not thought to ask about Nick, or to wonder why the detective had not followed them through the hole.

"He is probably back there, inside the warehouse," he said. "Come!"

The five retraced their steps, and were soon again in the room where so much that was unusual had happened: and by this time the smoke, produced by the explosion, had cleared almost entirely away, and one could see clearly across the room.

It needed only a glance around to discover that Nick Carter was not there.

Conner, and Chick, and Patsy searched with their eyes at the same time, but unavailingly.

Nick had vanished!

Not one of the three men spoke a word for fully half a minute, for each one of them was so surprised by the discovery as to be incapable of immediate speech. Each was trying to explain to his own satisfaction why Nick Carter was not there, and each found a different explanation.

"Nick discovered that the conspirators were making their escape through the hole under the platform, and has followed them," said Conner; and he smiled, as if perfectly satisfied with the idea.

"I think he must have discovered the hole when you opened the window, Conner, and have gone through it ahead of us," said Chick. "He will probably return soon."

"No," said Patsy, with decision. "Neither of you are right."

"Eh?" said Conner. "What do you mean, Patsy?"

"The chief did not go away from here of his own accord; he has been taken away by force."

"How can you assume that?"

"Durland is also missing," said Patsy.

"Durland? Who is he?" demanded Conner; for he knew nothing of the history of Durland, or of the man's connection with the previous cases, and this incident.

"Durland?" Patsy echoed Conner's question, and laughed. "He is the real cause of all this scene, Con-

ner. But for Durland we would not have been here. But for his love affair——Oh, what's the use?"

"What's the use of what, Patsy?"

"What's the use of our asking fool questions of one another? The chief isn't here; and neither is Durland. Both are missing. I can understand easily enough what it means, if the rest of you do not."

"What does it mean?" asked Conner. "Don't forget, Patsy, that I know nothing about the incidents that have led up to this scene. The first intimation I had of it was when I received a letter from Nick, at my hotel, telling me to go to a certain house, uptown, and to watch out and to keep in sight all who should come out of it. I was led here—and that, as a matter of fact, is all I know."

"It is enough, really, Conner—all that is necessary to know."

"But——"

"Listen: There was a conspiracy hatched somewhere in South America. The Carerras, father and daughter—the others don't count—came here as chief conspirators. The conspiracy meant a general uprising throughout South America, and tens of thousands of lives would have been uselessly sacrificed. Durland, who was a sort of sudden fancy of the chief's, fell in love with Carmen Carerra. There you have it."

"There I do *not* have it.'

"Well, when you showed up suddenly at the door, there, with the cops, Durland had just turned on Carmen. She didn't take it kindly, either. My opinion is, that before she touched off that suffocating bomb, for that is all it was, being intended to hold us back until they could make their escape——"

"Yes."

"Before she did that, she probably gave directions that the chief and Durland were to be attacked in the confusion that would follow. The long and short of it is, that the chief has been overpowered, and carried away."

"It is not such an easy thing to overpower Nick Carter," suggested Conner, shaking his head.

"No; I am aware of that, Conner; but they might have been as well prepared for that as they were to make their escape."

"Well?"

"It was mighty opaque here, if anybody should ask you. Likewise, it wasn't easy to draw a decent breath."

"I grant you that, Patsy."

"Most of us were thinking about how the next breath was to be taken in, and weren't paying much attention to whom he went up against in the darkness."

"I suppose that is so."

"It wouldn't have been much of a job for somebody, who knew where the chief was standing, or who was near him when he spoke, to have hit him on the head with a blackjack; and even Nick Carter's head is not proof against such as that, in the grasp of a strong man."

"Do you really suppose that that is what has happened?"

"I do."

"And with the other man, too?"

"What other man? Oh! Durland? Well, I don't know as to that. Nick was mighty ready to forgive Durland for all he had done, but I didn't feel so generous. How was it with you, Chick?"

"I think I would trust the man as long as he was not near the influence of Carmen," was Chick's reply; "but in the light of her eyes I don't think he could be trusted."

"It amounts to this," said Patsy, speaking again. "The chief was assaulted and carried away from here when the conspirators made their escape. I haven't a doubt of that. Now, either Durland assisted in that assault, or he was taken by force also. I don't know as it makes much difference which, does it, Conner?"

"No."

Conner turned with a decided gesture, toward the three prisoners; for there were only the three before mentioned, who had failed to make good their escape.

"Bring those fellows here," he said to one of the policemen; and in a moment the three stood in line in front of him.

For a moment Conner was silent, while he studied the men before him.

What he saw in them was merely three rather poorly clad, but determined-looking men. Their eyes were clear and fearless in expression, and they had a certain air of daredevil assurance about them, which would at once attract the chief conspirator. In a word, they looked to be just the sort of men who would be picked out for the undertaking that was on foot.

When they were lined up before Conner, they looked fearlessly into his eyes; not one of them had the air of a man who was afraid.

"Who and what are you?" Conner asked them abruptly.

Two of the men turned their eyes toward the third,

who answered at once, as if it had already been agreed between them that he should be spokesman for all.

"We are just what you see," he replied coolly; "no more and no less."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Conner.

"I mean that three days, or at the most, four days ago, we were all merely wanderers over the earth, unknown to one another. Now we are here, having cast our lots with an outfit of foreigners who have given us the double-cross."

"Oh; I see; they went back on you, did they?" asked Conner, smiling.

"Doesn't it look that way, sir?"

"I'll admit that it does."

"Well, if I tell you my own experience, it will be the story of all three of us. If, after I have finished, the others have anything to add to what I say, well and good. Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes. Speak up."

CHAPTER III.

A QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE.

"My name will not interest you," said the man, beginning his story. "If you want a name, I will mention one, but it won't be my own."

"Never mind the name."

"Four days ago I arrived in New York, having just returned from Europe, where I went broke. How I went broke doesn't matter."

"No."

"I was ripe for anything. I was out of money, and I like adventure—of any sort. Then I scraped acquaintance with the man who stands next to me now. We had a drink or two together, and after it I told him something about my condition of mind. Does all this hold any interest for you, sir?"

"Yes; go on."

"Well, he told me that about an hour before we met up with each other, he had been approached by a man who had talked earnestly to him. The man had asked him if he would like to go to a foreign country and engage in an enterprise which would insure rapid advancement, and a lot of money. The man had given him a piece of white chalk, and had told him to go to a certain place in the city, at a certain time, and to make certain marks with the white chalk. Then something would happen. See?"

"Yes."

"The marks he was to make were merely the initials of his own name. Catch onto that?"

"Yes."

"Well, my new acquaintance suggested that it wouldn't be a bad idea if I was to do the same thing—and he broke the chalk in half, and gave me a portion of it."

"Well?"

"We discussed the affair for a while, wondered what it was, rather liked the idea of it, and partly guessed what it was. See?"

"Yes."

"First off, we were going to make the chalk marks at the same time; but when we thought it over we decided that he should do it first, and that I would follow him. We stood near the place for a time, and we saw others make their marks, as I have described. Among them was the third man of this bunch. Onto that?"

"Yes," replied Conner. He was smiling by now, for he began to realize that these men knew very little more about the affair than he did himself.

"We two liked the looks of the other one, and so we kept tabs on him. Later, when we met up with him, we made a sort of agreement to hang together. That is why we are here now."

"But what came of the chalk marks?"

"We were given a message which told us to go to a certain corner, at a stated hour, where we would receive further instructions. There we were told to report at another place, at eight-thirty p. m. From the other place we were finally conducted here."

"What happened when you were brought here?"

"There was a fellow on the platform there, who had a book which we were required to sign. Then we were regularly enlisted to go to South America. We took several oaths, and there was a lot more rot of the same sort; but we were given fifty dollars each, and were told that we would receive ten more at the end of each week, until the time came to go away, after which our pay would be increased. Then we were told to mix with the others."

"Well?"

"That is about all."

"How does it happen that you did not know of the way of escape?"

"Because we were not told."

"Was it an oversight, or was it intentional, that you were not told about that?"

"I give it up, mister. I don't know."

"All the others seemed to know about it."

"All the others did know about it. You see, we were the only new ones at this place."

"How do you know that?"

"Well, I expect that it's a sort of a joke on the people that met here; on the conspirators themselves."

"How is that?"

"We were evidently sent here by mistake; but when the mistake was discovered, they made the best of it, and explained as they thought fit. What they said was that two or three colors of chalk had been used in arranging for the meetings, and that we had come to a red meeting instead of a white one. See?"

"Not very clearly."

"Well, the *red* meetings were for officers; the white meetings were for the enlisted men."

"Oh."

"But since we had got to the wrong place, it was thought as well that we should remain, and we were even assured that we might be accepted as officers, after the meeting was over, in which case our pay would be increased at once. That suited us, all right."

"I suppose so."

"All that I can tell you about it, sir, is that we heard enough to know that while this was the only officers meeting in the city to-night, there were seven or eight other meetings, in other sections of the city, which were referred to as White meetings; and, after this meeting should adjourn to-night, there was to have been a Blue meeting—which same I take to mean that the generals and commanders-in-chief of the whole bunch were to meet. See?"

"Yes. I see. I think you must be right about that."

"I am sure of it."

"So, in reality, you three took no part in the business of the meeting?" asked Conner.

"Not a mite, sir."

"Not even at the time when the life of Nick Carter and his two assistants were threatened?"

"Not even then. We didn't like the looks of it, not a little bit; but we thought it best for all concerned not to butt in."

"I understand you."

"I hope you do, sir. We didn't go into this thing with any intention of engaging in murdering enterprises. That wasn't any part of the agreement we signed. We didn't like it, and we three had already agreed that if things were carried too far we would go together, in the morning, to the police and tell all we knew. You weren't here, and you don't know what happened, do you?"

"No."

"Well, Nick Carter and the two men with him were told that they would be shot, unless——"

What the man might have said, further, was interrupted by an exclamation from Patsy. He had been an interested listener to what had been said, but so much interest had been felt in what might have happened to Nick Carter that the young assistant had totally forgotten one thing that had occurred at that meeting, until the words of the man reminded him of it.

When the thought occurred to him, he seized Chick by the shoulder, and whirled him around at the same time, exclaiming:

"Chick, for Heaven's sake come with me! We have forgotten Adelina!"

He turned and dashed through the door toward the street, followed by Chick, while the others who were present stared in amazement. Only the three captured men understood the reason for Patsy's going so suddenly.

Conner turned again toward the man who had been telling the story.

"What happened here to make my friend act like that?" he asked.

"I suppose he had forgotten, until I reminded him of it by what I said, that his wife was in danger," replied the man.

"His wife?"

"Yes. They call her Adelina. The woman who was here, who queened it over them all, had made her a prisoner. She threatened that chap, that if he did not sign the oath his wife's life should be forfeited also."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Conner.

"Oh, she was a honey-cooler, that woman was," continued the man; "and a good-looker, too. I don't think I ever saw a handsomer woman, sir; and such a pair of eyes!"

"What more have you to tell me?"

"That is all."

"Have you told me all that you know about this affair?"

"Everything."

"Are you positive about that?"

"Yes."

"Is it your intention, and also that of your friends, to renew your acquaintance with the men of the conspiracy?"

"We have not discussed it; but for one, I think I have had enough."

The other two men nodded acquiescence to what he said; but Conner continued:

"I will make it worth your while for all of you if you *will* renew your relations with those men—in my interests."

"Just so that we could betray them, do you mean?" asked the spokesman.

"Yes."

"Well, sir, for one, I couldn't see my way clear to do that."

"Why? You do not approve of——"

"Just a minute, mister. No; I do not approve of their methods; that's sure. But my own method of doing things has to meet with my own approval, or else I ain't much good to anybody."

"What do you mean by that?"

"If I was asked to go into the thing for the specific purpose you have named, I wouldn't hesitate an instant; but, you see, I went into it in good faith; I took their oath in good faith. If I had taken their oath with a determination to betray them, that would have been one thing; but I didn't, so it is another. No, sir, I couldn't do what you ask."

"I see your point," replied Conner slowly, "and it is well taken. You are right. It did not strike me just that way at the moment I suggested it. But there is another aspect of the case, which has not occurred to you."

"What is it?"

"By reason of your presence here, you were really as guilty of swearing away the life of three men as if you had actually taken part in the proceedings. Now, it happens that one of the men is still in danger of losing his life, and that a woman is also threatened, by your own statement."

"By jingo, you are right about that, sir!"

"Don't you think that you owe it to yourself to do all that is in your power to prevent those acts?"

"I do. I do."

"And your friends? How do they feel about it?" asked Conner, turning to them.

"Whatever Burke says, we stand to," replied one of them, and the other man nodded.

"What do you say, Burke, if that is your name?"

"Just let me think it over for a moment, will you?"

"Certainly; but make haste."

"It won't take me more'n a minute to decide."

"Very well. I will wait for you."

CHAPTER IV.

ADELINA TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME.

"What's your name?" Burke asked bluntly of Conner, presently, after he had remained silent for a time, thinking over the problem upon which he had to decide.

"Conner, Conroy Conner," was the calm reply.

"What might be your business? Are you a police officer?"

"No; I am connected with the secret service department of the government. With this matter, here, I have nothing to do whatever, save as a friend of Nick Carter."

"I see. Now, Mr. Conner, will you reply quite frankly to a question which I would like to ask you?"

"I will."

"Put yourself in my place, and tell me what you would do if our positions were reversed. That is what I would like to have you answer, sir."

"I should have felt precisely as you expressed yourself a moment ago, Burke. Having gone into the thing in good faith, and accepted the oath that was given me to take, I should have felt like standing by my contract. But, as you say, you did not contract to take part in deliberate murders, nor to countenance them, if they were to be committed?"

"No, sir."

"And I think that you are released from your obligations, in a measure, by that event. I believe, that so far as the danger to Nick Carter and to Mrs. Garvan are concerned, you are, on the contrary, under an obligation to do everything in your power to prevent the contemplated crimes. I would regard it as almost a special obligation on your part, indeed."

"Thank you. I had begun to see it in that light, too."

"Do you see it so now?"

"Yes."

"You will assist me?"

"As far as I can do so, sir; yes. That is, I will assist you as far as protection to those two persons may extend."

"Very well."

"That is all you ask?"

"Yes."

"What do you wish me and my two friends, who are with me, to do?"

"Will they be with you in this?"

"You bet your life we will," replied the one who had spoken before.

Conner was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"I will send you away from this place, in charge of two policemen, who will have instructions to permit you to escape, without much effort at resistance, soon after you reach the street. It may, or it may not be, that you will be seen to escape by those who were here with you. If it does become known to them, it will be reported in a way that will continue your good standing among those conspirators. You understand that?"

"Yes."

"After you have made your escape, it will be your duty to ally yourselves with the conspirators again, without delay. When you have done that—and it should be accomplished very speedily to do any good——"

"I was thinking of that same thing, sir."

"When you have done that much, the remainder of your duty will be plain."

"Yes?"

"And I don't think you will need instructions in regard to it."

"No. We are merely to do all that is possible to save the life of Nick Carter, and to help Mrs. Garvan to escape from her captors. I put it in that way because really, sir, I do not believe that the woman's life is in danger."

"Don't you? I do. Take this card. I have written Nick Carter's address upon it. When you have anything to report, send it there, or take it there. If you go in person, tell the man who admits you, whose name will be Joseph, who you are and what you want. He will attend to the rest."

"Thank you, sir. Is that all?"

"Yes. Do you need money?"

"No, sir. We are well supplied, thanks to the men who induced us to come here."

Conner sent them away, then, in charge of the officers, as he had said he would do, and they presently made their escape as Conner had directed.

Whether he would ever hear from them again or not was problematical to Conner, but he regarded it as a chance worth taking, and did not hesitate; besides, he did not want the men as prisoners. He believed the story that was told to him; and they were not really guilty of any wrong.

He thanked the policemen who had accompanied him, and dismissed them, giving the lieutenant in charge a report to make to the commissioner; then he boarded a car that would take him again to the vicinity of the house he had already watched once that night; the house to which John Durland had lured Nick Carter, and his two assistants, in order that they might be overpowered and captured.

But, as he more than half-expected, he found no sign there that Durland, or any other person, had returned to it after the meeting at the warehouse.

He did not know where to go after that. He knew nothing about the house in Riverside Drive, where Carmen lived with her father, to which reference has already been made in the first chapter of this story.

"The most likely place to obtain information about this business, now, is Nick's own home," he told himself; and so he took his way thither without further delay.

A pleasurable surprise greeted him when he arrived there.

He found Patsy and Adelina together in the library. Chick had not yet returned, being still engaged in the search for his chief.

Patsy started to his feet when Conner entered the room.

"We were waiting for you, and expecting you," he told Conner, seizing his hand. "I knew that you would come here as soon as you could do so. You see that Adelina is safe, after all. I doubt if she has really been in any danger, although she might have been so, had I delayed any longer in going after her."

"What about Nick?" asked Conner.

"We could find no trace of the chief, Conner."

"Tell me what you did."

"Well, you see, in the excitement of losing Nick, I forgot all about the danger that threatened my wife, but when that fellow started to talk, it all came back to me on the instant."

"Yes. I know."

"When Chick and I ran from the warehouse together, we hadn't gone two blocks before we happened upon an automobile, with only one man in it. That man happened to be its owner, and when I had hailed him and told him of our extremity, he was only too glad to be of service to us. He whirled us to the house in Riverside Drive, in double-quick time, and when a servant appeared at the door, to know what we wanted, we just brushed him aside, and entered. We found Adelina locked in a room on the top floor. She had not been injured, or even threatened. She had not even seen Carmen Carerra; but she knew she was a prisoner, of course. I don't think that Carmen intended to return to that house after my wife, Conner."

"Perhaps not."

"They managed to get the best of Nick; they cap-

tured him; and now, according to my idea of the thing, they intend to offer us terms."

"Holding him as hostage?"

"Just that."

"Nick isn't easily held by such people."

"That is true enough; but they have sure got him foul just now. If they had not, he would be here, or we would have heard from him."

"I agree with you, there."

"You see——"

"Wait a moment, Patsy."

"Well?"

"Remember that I know next to nothing about this case. All I know is what was told me by those three men at the warehouse."

"Yes."

"I want you to tell me the whole story from beginning to end. Everything."

"It seems too bad to waste the time, Conner, but——"

"The time won't be wasted."

So Patsy told the whole story, leaving nothing out of it; the story, with all its embellishments, as we have referred to it in the first chapter; and Conner listened to the end without an interruption.

"It strikes me," he said, at the conclusion, "that we are up against rather a difficult proposition. These people are not ordinary lawbreakers, Patsy."

"I know that."

"They are working for a great purpose; at least for something which they define as a great purpose, and one, which if it succeeds, would win them the admiration of the world."

"That is quite true."

"And that young woman, who seems to be the brains of the whole thing, is striving for a crown."

"Yes."

"She will get it, too, if she is not stopped."

"Possibly."

"That love affair between her and Durland seemed rather sudden, didn't it?"

"It was mighty sudden, on his part. I don't believe that she was half as badly affected by it as he was; at least not until the moment when he denounced her, there at the meeting. But you did not see and hear that, Conner."

"No; but I saw the finish of it. She seemed to me to be making a last appeal to Durland when I entered the room."

"She was."

"And he turned his back upon her?"

"Yes."

"I only had a glimpse of her face, but I should say that she is very beautiful. Is she not?" He addressed the question to Adelina.

"Yes," replied the latter, with perfect candor. "Carmen is a beautiful woman. She is a siren, when she chooses to be one."

"I was calculating," said Conner, "if she would have a chance of winning Durland over to her way of thinking, once she had him to herself."

"More than likely," replied Adelina, shrugging her shoulders. "There is no telling what a man will do when he is looking into the eyes of a beautiful woman."

"I think," said Conner, "that the man will be more easily traced, even though he is a prisoner, than the woman. I shall bend my energies to finding him. If he should be won over to the woman's side again, he will be allowed his liberty, and in some manner he will use it. That goes without saying."

"Yes. But, Mr. Conner, while you are looking for the man, I will look for the woman."

"You, Adelina?"

"Yes; while you, and Patsy, and Chick are searching for the men in this affair, I shall take it upon myself to find Carmen Carerra, and when I do find her——"

She did not complete the sentence, but the pause was significant.

CHAPTER V.

ADELINA'S REMARKABLE SKILL.

Our duty just now is to follow Adelina, for she it was who finally worked out the problem that had suddenly been presented to Nick Carter's household.

Adelina is endowed with the talents and the gifts which go to make a good detective. Nick had often made the remark, that had she been a man she would have been a great one in that line. Now, she saw an opportunity to make use of her talents.

She said no more to the two men on the subject, and when, after she did speak so to Conner, Patsy turned toward her in surprise, she reached out and placed her fingers over his lips, and said to him:

"Now, Patsy, don't interfere. It isn't often that I go against your wishes, but I shall do so this time, if you oppose me. Carmen Carerra is a woman; so am I. We are both South Americans. I know her characteristics, and can read what she might do, under given conditions, better than a man could; better than

any other woman, not a South American, could; better even than I could tell *you* how to do it."

"She is right, Patsy," said Conner.

"But," objected Patsy, "you just now referred to those people as a hard proposition. They are that. They are desperate, too."

"There is no doubt about that."

"They will stop at nothing, not even at the sacrifice of Adelina, if she should get in their way."

Adelina interrupted them by laughing.

"As if I do not understand my own people," she said. "Do you suppose, when they are coolly considering the sacrifice of tens of thousands of lives, they would hesitate at mine? No; not at all. In those countries, down there, women sometimes take arms, and fight in the field with their fathers, and husbands, and brothers. I know what I am doing. Say no more about it, for I am determined."

"At least give me some idea of what you intend to do," said Patsy.

"I intend to find Carmen Carerra; that is all. What I shall do after I have found her will be determined by her own attitude," was the calm reply.

"How will you find her?"

"Ah, I do not know—as yet. But I shall find a method."

"Let her have her way, Patsy," said Conner. "After all, I shouldn't wonder if Adelina beats us both. Come; we will leave her to her plans, and permit her to work them out as she will. I must speak with Joseph about those men I talked with this afternoon. Come with me."

So they left Adelina to herself.

But she did not long remain in the room where they parted with her.

As soon as she was alone, she hastened to her own room, and presently she was on her knees before a teak-wood box which contained certain treasures of hers, and which she had pulled from its place at the extremity of one of the deep closets off her room.

She threw back the lid after unlocking it, disclosing many little treasures which she had brought with her from her home in Chili; but she continued to search down deeper among them, until presently she brought forth a small, square box of mahogany, and this she also unlocked and opened.

From that she produced a picture; a photograph; and she held it closer to the light, so that she might study it.

"Inez Redenda," she murmured, with her eyes on the photograph. "Yes; my father was right about it. I do look like her—a little. He used to say so. It is strange that I should have preserved this picture of a woman I never saw, or heard about, save only what my father told me about one of the revolutions in Bolivia."

But she had preserved it among her treasures, and merely because, in handing it to her to destroy, once upon a time in the past, her father had told her about the woman, and had said that Adelina looked like her.

The resemblance was, nevertheless, not distinct. It could hardly be said to exist at all, save that both were dark, both had flashing eyes, and both were Chilians.

But Adelina remembered more that her father had said about Inez Redenda at that time. He had spoken of her as a patriot; as a fearless woman; as one who worked constantly to right the wrongs of others; as one who was always at the head and front of any rebellion or revolution which had the betterment of a country for its object. And he had spoken of her, also, as the first love of Don José Carerra; as the woman whom Don José would have married, had she not been imprisoned and condemned to be shot.

But it was not known whether she was shot, or if she escaped.

That was all. It is the history, in one paragraph, of the woman whose picture Adelina now held in her hand and studied; of a woman who would be nearly sixty years old if she were living. But, also, of a woman who, if she had been alive, would, without question, have been engaged in the present conspiracy.

The memory of the story told by her father returned to Adelina when she was wondering how she would take up the work she had set for herself, and she remembered that she had not destroyed the photograph, but had kept it.

The picture was that of a young woman, scarcely older than Adelina herself. It had been taken before Adelina was born. But it was still fairly well preserved, and Adelina carried it across the room to the mirror, and then stood there, first scanning the face in the picture, and then her own reflection.

For a long time she did that; and then, impulsively, she began what she had decided to do.

First she brought from Patsy's dressing-room his box of make-up material, used by him in creating his disguises, and she arranged the contents of it on the dresser in front of her.

Her first act after that was to take down her own luxuriant hair, and to redress it, exactly as it appeared in the photograph on the head of Inez Redenda.

The effect of this could be seen at once. The likeness

between the two faces had now become much more striking.

Next, Adelina began to employ articles taken from the box of make-up.

Little by little, studying each line as she made it, she made the likeness between the face in the picture and her own the more striking; and she did not desist in this, until with a sigh of relief she pronounced herself perfectly satisfied, as indeed she might well have been.

"There!" she exclaimed, addressing her own reflection in the mirror. "If the time were nearly forty years ago, I think I could pass very well for Inez Redenda, the patriot. Now, how am I to add the appearance of forty years, or nearly that, to my own face? Inez Redenda was twenty-four years old when she was imprisoned. Nobody has ever seen her since that time. But I have this picture of her, and I have a *mantilla* that once belonged to her. I really think that I can make it go."

Again she worked with the cosmetics, drawing a faint line here, a deeper one there, adding "crow's-feet," or the faint traces of them, wherever she thought necessary. She darkened certain surfaces of her own beautiful neck, giving it a less plump appearance; and over all this, when it was done, she put a thin coating of facial enamel, thus giving the effect of an elder woman who had attempted to make herself appear younger. It was a masterly stroke, and it was effective, too.

But there was still the luxuriant hair to be dealt with.

"Inez Redenda's hair, if she were alive, would be almost white by this time," Adelina told herself; "but also, she would have made some effort to keep it dark. Now let me see what I can do."

There was among the preparations in the box a bottle of bismuth, powdered chalk, glycerine, and one or two other ingredients, used to whiten the hair over the temples. She poured a quantity of this mixture into a saucer, and dipped her comb into it.

Then, exercising great care, she ran the comb through her midnight tresses, touching them first just above the temples, and then extending her efforts, making a decided touch here, and one less decided in another place, and presently stood back to view her work.

She appeared, unmistakably, like a woman of middle age, now, and she laughed aloud as she viewed her reflection in the glass.

"It is hardly enough for my purposes," she told herself again; and once more she had recourse to the comb and the saucer.

This time she made her hair almost white, but left a suggestion of its original color in places; and when at last she was quite satisfied with what she had accomplished in that respect, she spent several minutes in walking briskly about the room, to wait till the mixture should dry.

From time to time she stopped in front of the glass to examine her hair again, and at last she paused there.

Now she brought forth a second saucer, and she proceeded to make for herself another mixture, which this time was inky in its blackness. Trust a beautiful woman for knowing all the secrets of make-up, even if it is not necessary to make use of them. There will always come a time when they may be necessary.

She used another comb with the black mixture, and she began to go carefully over her hair where she had whitened it, skipping here and there a strand of it; and she worked on in that manner for almost an hour, carefully, and with studious deliberation.

The effect, when she had finished, was marvelous.

Adelina had succeeded in producing exactly the effect she desired. Her hair looked as if it had turned white, or nearly so, and she had tried to darken it with a comb dipped into a mixture made for that purpose.

The mere thought of attempting to create a disguise in this manner was worthy of a genius. Adelina had succeeded beyond her expectations, and she had had great hopes, too.

The final preparations were less difficult.

Adelina knew perfectly well the fashions and customs of her own country. She, therefore, correctly understood just how Inez Redenda would have dressed herself, had she indeed been alive, and just arrived in America; and Adelina had a plentiful supply of things she had brought with her from Santiago to arrange what she wanted.

Remember, please, that she was doing all this work during the deep hours of the night, for it was late when she parted with her husband and Conner in the library. But she had known that they would go out at once to prosecute the search they had undertaken, and she had no thought of delaying her own plans.

Besides, a part of them consisted in her being able to leave the house, in the disguise she had selected, before another day should break.

It did not take her long to array herself in the costume she selected, or to pack, with a few necessary articles, a small bag.

At last, arrayed for the street, she stood before the

long, pier glass in her room to see the entire effect of her changed appearance, and she smiled with pleasure.

"It will succeed!" she told herself, with a glad voice. "Old Don José will be deceived. He will remember only how Inez Redenda looked when he last saw her, and he will see the resemblance now, grown much older. Ah, if only I can worm myself into his confidence! I wonder if I can? I wonder!"

She used the telephone to call a carriage; then she summoned Joseph to her; and Joseph paused upon the threshold, dismayed by what he saw.

"You would not have known me, would you, Joseph?" she asked him.

"No, indeed, madam," he replied.

"Very well. I have telephoned for a carriage. When it comes, I shall drive away. If my husband asks where I have gone, tell him the truth—that you do not know."

CHAPTER VI.

CAREFUL DETECTIVE WORK.

Adelina's movements from that instant are interesting as showing the natural genius of Patsy's wife; for that she was one, events presently proved to the satisfaction of all.

When the carriage arrived she ordered herself driven slowly down-town, telling the driver that she would give him further directions later on. The time was then a little after three in the morning and it would soon be getting light.

Now that she was prepared for it, dawn could not arrive too quickly to suit her.

Presently, when a newsboy was crying his wares along the street, she hailed him from the window of the carriage and bought a *Herald,* which she studied carefully for a time; then she signaled to the driver and told him to go slowly, by a route she named, and finally to stop at a pier on West Street; but before that was done she managed to kill time enough to suit her purposes.

When they arrived at the pier and the driver got down from his perch to assist her to alight, she took him into her confidence, in a measure—and paid him well for being the recipient of it; and the result was that she continued to sit inside the carriage and to read her paper until a ship had docked, long after her arrival there.

But the moment the first passengers began to appear, coming from the newly arrived vessels, she awoke to life again; the driver picked up his reins, and they drove away for the Hotel America, where all South Americans naturally gravitate when they first arrive in the City of New York.

There she procured two rooms, paying in advance for them; and you may be sure that she lost no time in seeking them and in getting some of the rest of which she stood so greatly in need; for it must be remembered that she had had no sleep the preceding night and had been almost constantly on the "go."

It was eight o'clock when she retired to rest; it was after eleven when she rang her bell for breakfast.

A little later she was down below, in the hotel office, and she spent some time in looking over the hotel register, scanning each name entered there as she did so, until at last she fell upon one which she believed would answer her purposes.

But when she pointed to the name and asked the clerk if the gentleman were still there, he shook his head and announced, in Spanish, for that was the language in which she addressed him:

"The señor has gone away, some time ago."

"Then, possibly you can give me the information I seek," she said to him.

"I will be happy to serve the señorita," replied the clerk. (It is always polite to address an unknown female as "señorita," in Spanish, no matter what her appearance of age may be.)

"Thank you. Then, I will tell you whom I wish to find."

"Yes?"

"I am very anxious indeed to see Don José Carerra."

As she uttered the name she leaned forward over the desk a little nearer to the clerk, and she dropped her voice to an undertone, so that none save themselves could hear; but the face of the clerk remained like a mask, and he showed no sign whatever that the utterance of the name, or the tone in which it was uttered, held any significance for him.

Nevertheless, Adelina continued, in the same low tone:

"I am an old friend of the general's. He would remember my name at once, and come to me instantly, if he had any idea that I was here. But, alas, señor, he thinks me dead. He has been led to think so for many years. Even you, señor, would recognize my name, I think, although you are young in years."

The clerk reached out toward the register, but she arrested his hand.

"Not there," she said. "Do you suppose that I would write my name there? Why if I did that, an hour would not pass, even in this country, before I should be besieged with callers."

"Indeed?" Incredulity was plainly written upon the clerk's face by now; but that was precisely as Adelina desired it.

"There is another reason, also," she added hastily, as if she were loath to reveal her true name and yet felt the necessity for doing so. "I have been supposed to be dead for many years, but instead, I have been immured in a prison. If it were known that I am alive and have escaped——"

She did not complete the sentence, but the pause was sufficiently emphatic.

"Will you tell me your name?" he asked her; and she did not hesitate.

"I am Inez Redenda," she pronounced slowly for him.

The effect of the mention of her name had an instant influence upon the attitude of the clerk toward her; it also had another effect, and one which told Adelina that she had made no mistake in selecting the character she had.

The clerk started perceptibly; he bent nearer to her and scrutinized her closely; and at last, as if recalling something dimly to his mind which served to partly convince him of the truth of her assertion, he murmured:

"Is it possible?"

"Quite."

"You are *the* Inez Redenda?"

"Yes. You see, I put confidence in your discretion, señor."

"Thank you. I will not abuse it. I do not doubt you, madam; and yet——"

"You find it difficult to believe me?"

"Yes."

"That is not surprising, señor. I have been supposed to be dead for very many years; so many that I have forgotten to count them."

"It is all so very strange, señora."

"I know it is."

"Pardon me again, but have you any means of proving what you say? I do not ask the question because I personally doubt you, but because there are others who would do so. If you could prove unquestionably that you are Inez Redenda, there are many persons in this country at the present time who would be glad to see you again, and to talk with you."

"I have only one means of proving what I say," she replied. "It is the one I ask you, only just now."

"I don't think I understand. What did you ask me, señora?"

"The address of Don José Carerra."

"Ah; I do not——"

"Pardon me, señor; it is not necessary that you should give me his address; it is not even necessary that you should inform him of my name or that any person wishes to see him."

"How, then——"

"If Don José were to see me, he would recognize me. Do you understand that?"

"I understand what you say; but——"

"I would not then require any proof as to who I am. His recognition of me would be proof enough, would it not?"

"How do you know that he would recognize you. Many years have passed since you met him—since he last saw you."

"Very many, indeed," she sighed.

"He might not remember you, even if he saw you."

"No? Perhaps not. Time *has* flown. I am an old woman, now, and he must be an old man, too. Possibly I would not know him. Ah! But yes I would! I would know Don José anywhere in the world; anywhere. And I believe that he would know me, notwithstanding these gray hairs, this seamed face and the many lines upon it. My friends have told me that I am not so greatly changed."

Adelina's manner as she gave utterance to the foregoing sentences, was inimitable; and it is impossible to describe it.

The pathos, the regret, the sadness, even the despair which she managed to incorporate in those words, passes description; and it all had its effect upon the clerk.

Adelina was and is a perfect actress, and she had need of this man.

Moreover, she understood by his manner that he knew where Don José might be communicated with, and she was determined to force him to send the old revolutionist the information of her arrival.

"Yes; he would recognize me, I am sure," she continued, as if speaking more to herself than to the man at the opposite side of the hotel desk. "If he does not——"

"Well, señora, if he should not recognize you——"

She raised her eyes to his and replied distinctly, although in a low tone:

"Then, indeed, it would be better had I died in prison."

The clerk was startled by the pathos in her voice, and he showed it, although he was one who was not given to demonstrations of his emotions.

"Señora——" he began; she interrupted him.

"Inez Redenda never married," she said pointedly.

"Pardon me. If you will let me use my own discretion in mentioning your name, señorita, it would give me pleasure in assisting you in your efforts to find Don José. Personally, I do not know anything about him, but it might be possible for me to communicate with some of his friends; that is, if he is now in this country at all."

"I was told that he was here, señor."

"Possibly he may be."

"Then, señor, if you will aid me in finding him, I will give you all the discretion you may care to use."

"Thank you. Then, if I might suggest——" He paused and she raised her eyes to his.

"Yes?" she asked him.

"If I might suggest that you pass the next two or three hours in the parlor of the hotel occupying the chair that faces the wide doorway; that you occupy yourself in reading and do not glance up at people who appear at the door, if you can do that——"

"Oh, I can do it. I can do anything that will offer a chance."

"Well, in that case it might be that some person would pass that door, when you were not looking, who would recognize you. If you are willing to put it to the test, señorita, I will do what I can for you."

"Thank you. I will go there at once."

"Have you a book with which to occupy yourself, señorita?"

She shrugged her shoulders and glanced toward the literature that was displayed upon a stand not far away.

"They are all in English," she replied.

"Ah, yes; pardon me." He reached under the desk and drew forth a worn copy of a Spanish novel. "Try this one. I am told that it is interesting, but I have not read it. I think that two hours will be all the test that will be required."

"I am extremely grateful to you, señor," she told him, accepting the book and turning away; and she went at once to the chair in the parlor to which the clerk had directed her.

She saw that it was admirably placed for the purpose, and she seated herself so that she could be plainly seen from the open doorway past which she knew that the clerk would presently send Don José Carerra.

But she knew that some time must elapse before the don could get there, for he would not likely be a guest at that hotel on this particular day, following so closely upon the scenes that occurred in the warehouse.

Still, she had no doubt the clerk would send for him, and that he would walk past the door.

CHAPTER VII.

ADELINA'S SKILFUL TACTICS.

If you have ever been called upon to pass two such hours as those were to Adelina, you will realize something of the sensations she felt during their continuance.

To be constantly in expectation of something and not to know what it may be, is trying; to be conscious of the fact that you are subject to espionage, and yet to show no sign that you are aware of it, requires a certain character of strength of mind which few persons possess.

Adelina knew very well indeed when people who were looking at her passed that doorway; and yet she never once raised her eyes toward it.

Once, when she supposed that the two hours must have elapsed, which the clerk had thought all that would be necessary, she glanced toward a clock that rested upon one of the mantels, to find that only half an hour had really flown. Flown? No; it had dragged itself along.

She gave herself to the task with renewed effort after that, and to assist her along the difficult, looked toward the clock oftener.

After a while she began to count the minutes till the two hours should expire; first she did it by quarter-hours; then by groups of five minutes; and when only five minutes of the two hours remained she remembered with something like despair that the clerk had said it might possibly require three hours of waiting.

Even then it seemed to Adelina that she could bear the strain no longer; as if she must start to her feet and scream, rather than sit there a moment longer, inactive.

Yet she did not move. She remained as she had been all the time, with her eyes fixed intently upon the pages of the open book in her lap.

If she could have stepped aside and looked at herself, she would have seen the personification of perfect repose.

She appeared as serene and calm, as unexpectant and indifferent to her surroundings as if she were in reality engaged as she seemed to be—in reading the book, and was oblivious to everything.

Then the startling moment came.

A shadow fell across the floor at her feet. She knew that a man had stepped silently in front of her, and stopped. She knew that he was looking down upon her. She could hear him breathe. Then she heard his voice.

It was low-toned, cautious, sad; but it was, to her ears, unmistakably the voice of Don José Carerra, although there was a distinct effort to disguise it. But the time was not long since she had been received in that man's parlors at the Holland House, whither, at Nick Carter's suggestion, she had gone to call upon him and his daughters.*

"Señora?" he said.

That was all. Adelina raised her eyes to his face. Otherwise she did not move.

But even what she saw startled her, the transformation in the appearance of the man was so great. He had not attempted to disguise his voice alone, but also his appearance, and he had succeeded much better with the latter.

"Señora?" the man repeated.

"Yes, señor?" she replied, without moving, and being careful to show no sign of recognition.

"Do you recognize me, señora?"

"No; I do not," she replied candidly.

"You were expecting some one, señora?"

"No."

"But you have expressed a desire to see—some one? No?"

"At least, I did not express such a desire to you."

"You do not recognize me, señora?"

"No."

"Nor my voice?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Would you, if he were to stand before you as I do, recognize José Carerra?"

Adelina pretended to half-start to her feet; then she sank back again upon the chair and closed her eyes. She made no reply in words, and she did not open her eyes again at once.

She heard him move nearer. She felt that he took one of her hands and held it. Then, in his natural tones, for she remembered them, he exclaimed, although under his breath:

"Inez, do you know me now! Now, that I speak in my natural tones?"

She opened her eyes with a start. She pretended to gasp for breath. She smiled wanly.

"Wait," she murmured. "Wait, José. Even though I was prepared for it, the shock is almost too great for me. Draw up a chair. Seat yourself near to me—and wait."

He did as she requested, and for a long time after that she remained absolutely silent and still. Adelina was proving herself to be a consummate actress.

"Do *you* recognize *me?*" she asked him, at last.

He pressed her hand, for he had retained his grasp upon it.

"I knew you at once," he replied. "I knew you the moment I glanced in through the doorway and saw you. I knew you, even though for years I have supposed you dead."

"And you did not come to me at once?"

"I dared not, Inez. I could not trust myself to do that. I waited. I walked the corridors. I went to the office; to the bar. I returned, and went away again. I did so many times, until at last I found courage to control myself."

"You were satisfied all the time?"

"Perfectly."

"You never doubted?"

"Not after I had seen you, Inez. I confess that until I looked upon you, I did not believe at all. At first I refused to come here and investigate. I regarded it as a trap."

"A trap? What kind of a trap? I do not understand."

"Oh, they set traps for me. I am as active as ever, Inez; and now——"

"Yes?" she murmured suggestively, when he paused.

"Now I am engaged upon a mission that is greater—far greater than any we ever undertook in the old days. But doubtless you have heard about it. Possibly that is why you are here, Inez?"

She hesitated a moment, undecided how to reply to this suggestion. She had not prepared for the question in just that form.

"You must tell me about it," she replied evasively, at last. "That is, if it is something you desire me to know. Am I greatly changed, José?"

"Not too greatly, judging from the flight of years. We are neither of us so young as we once were, Inez."

"No," sadly. "And you married; and you have two beautiful daughters, I am told."

"Yes."

*See Nick Carter Weekly No. 640.

"And a loving wife, José?"

He shrugged his shoulders and half-turned away as if to give her the impression that his married life might have been happier, could he have arranged it differently. Adelina hated him anew for that. She despised a man who would do such things, even by innuendo. If she had felt compunctions a moment ago, for the part she was playing, they fled from her now, and she returned to the mental combat with renewed zeal. He replied to her question:

"I have a wife. She is the mother of my daughters, but she is not the wife I would have——"

"Hush! You must not say such things. I will not listen. If there is another word of that sort, I will leave you, and I shall be sorry that I sought you."

"Forgive me, Inez. I will not err again; but——"

"No more, José," she interrupted sharply. He bowed his head and was silent.

"Tell me about your daughters," she suggested.

"Ah, they are gorgeous creatures; so alike that at times it is difficult for me to tell one from the other, if they do not speak, and if they do not happen to look at me."

"You know the difference when they speak?"

"Instantly. They were cast in the same moulds, but different material was used."

"I understand."

"They are twins, you know."

"Yes?"

"Emilia is all gentleness. Carmen is like a man, and a warrior of the Crusades."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"You did not name one of them for me?"

"No; I—it would not have been best."

"Perhaps not."

"Tell me more about them. Which one do you love best?"

"I love them both dearly; but differently."

"That is natural."

"And I have ambition for both, also."

"That is like you."

"Carmen will be a queen, and——"

"Is she, then, to marry a prince who will become a king?"

"No. It is to be the result of another revolution, Inez. I may not tell you about it in this public place; but later I will do so. But it is magnificent. Ah, the extent of it! The grandeur of it! The exalted aim of it all! It is grand!"

"I must hear all about it, José."

"Later you shall hear; but it would not be well to discuss it here, in this place."

"No."

"You are staying here, at this hotel?"

"I arrived only this morning. I did not know where to go. I have no baggage. I came away with the fewest things I could manage with. You know I am under an assumed name?" (Indeed she was under an assumed name, but he did not guess at half her meaning when she smiled upon him as she asked the question).

"You are without funds?"

"No; I am well supplied with money. Those who love me saw to that."

"Naturally. Have you only just escaped from prison, Inez?"

"As you see, José."

"After—how many years is it, Inez?"

"Long ago I ceased to count them."

"One could not blame you for that. So the report of your death was false, as so many of the statements of our dastardly governments of South America are false; eh?"

"My presence here with you is sufficient answer to that question."

"True. But where shall you live, now that you are here?"

"I had hoped that you would have something to suggest as to that. I had hoped to meet and know your wife and daughters. I had hoped that you would be eager to take me to them; but if——"

He hesitated for a while; then he spoke.

"Yesterday, or the day before, I would have been glad to do so," he said. "Then I live openly, and looked men in the face; but something happened last night which has changed all that. For the moment I do not know what to do. But there will be a way. Let me think for a time; I will find a way."

"A way for what, José?"

"A way to care for you; a way to take you as my guest; a way to bring you in contact with my daughters and my wife."

"Thank you," she said; and waited.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HOUSE OF SECRETS.

It was after dark that evening before Adelina was again "on the war-path" as she expressed it in her thoughts.

But when it was quite dark, when, as if to assist her in what she wished to accomplish, a heavy fog had settled over the city, shrouding it more than the darkness ever did, a closed carriage waited at the door of the hotel for her, and presently she came out and entered it, and was driven away.

She was alone, and she had no idea whither the carriage would take her, but she was not at all dismayed by that fact.

The conversation with Don José had continued more than an hour after their meeting in the parlor of the hotel, and then he had taken his leave.

But before going he had made arrangements with her that at a stated hour that evening a carriage—*the* carriage—would be in waiting at the door. Her duty consisted merely in going outside, stepping into it, and permitting herself to be driven away, whereso-ever the driver should choose to take her.

But Adelina knew what the destination was, if not where it was.

She was to be conveyed where she would meet and know—in the character she now represented—the family of Don José. She was to be taken where she would be quite near to Nick Carter, although naturally his name had not been mentioned between them at the interview.

Don José had mentioned his home in Riverside Drive, but, alas, it was no longer available for his uses.

Hitherto he had been permitted to work openly, to a certain extent, but henceforth he must school himself to remain under cover lest he be arrested and deprived of his usefulness.

But he had told her that there was another place; another home which he had prepared for the reception of himself and family, in the event of just such an emergency as this one.

And it had been selected and made ready with exceeding care. Nothing had been left undone to render it thorough in its way of a place of concealment, and a place where their operations could be carried on with little fear of consequences.

Don José had given Adelina no idea where it was located.

Indeed, he had told her frankly that he could not do so.

"Even the men who assist me in this work do not know how to find me," he said to her. "There are only two persons on the outside who do know how to reach me. It is through one of them that all information must come."

"Then the hotel clerk is one?" she had asked.

"Not by any means. He knows a person, who in turn is acquainted with another person, who does know one of the men who hold my secret."

"You are well guarded," she volunteered; and he had replied:

"It is necessary now; but it will not be for long. We are almost ready to move."

That comprehended the information that Adelina had gleaned thus far; but it was a long step in advance, and she knew, when she entered the carriage, that she was on her way to find out the rest of the secret.

She wondered, with a little smile in her eyes, if Conner and Patsy had been as successful as she had been; she wondered what they would say if they could know, then, where she was and all that she had accomplished.

She entered the carriage in the darkness and the fog, and it drove away with her.

She had supposed she would be able to recognize the streets and avenues they passed along during that drive, and she might have been able to do so had the fog been less dense; but as it was, she was soon thoroughly lost, as far as her location was concerned. New York City was not the familiar place to her that it would have been to Patsy, or to Nick Carter.

There were portions of it that she knew familiarly, but there were other parts of it that were as strange to her as if she were in another city.

From Irving Place they drove northward; they turned around Grammercy Park into Fourth Avenue; and then, after a few more turns, she entirely lost her bearings, so that after an hour had passed and the carriage came to a stop, she only knew that it had gone a long way, had made many turns, had followed almost every imaginable direction, and that they were still within the limits of the confined spaces of the great city.

But whether the large, old-fashioned house before which they stopped was in the upper or lower part of the city, on the west side or the east side, she had no idea.

The driver got down from his perch and opened the door for her; then he pointed silently toward the house in question.

She ascended the steps, and reached out for the bell; but the door opened before she could touch it, and she stepped into a wide, bare hallway, whereupon the door instantly closed again, and she was in utter darkness.

She did not know if it were a man or a woman who had admitted her.

Her impulse was to be just a little bit frightened at the mystery of it all, but she controlled that impulse, and waited.

Then she gave a start, for a hand had reached out through the darkness and touched her.

Instinctively, she drew away from it; but a woman's voice—a low, sweet voice it was, too, said:

"Do not fear, señorita. I will guide you if you will let me take your arm."

It was the voice of Emilia Carerra. Adelina recognized it instantly. It was the lesser daughter of Don José, who had been appointed to be her guide.

At least, it told Adelina something; it told her that she was in the right place, and that thus far she had not been amiss, or deceived in her undertakings.

"Guide me," she replied, in Spanish, for Inez Redenda was not supposed to understand English very well.

Adelina was led through the hallway to the rear; thence down the stairs toward the basement of the house; thence into the yard at the rear.

They passed through a door that had been cut in the fence, and entered another house; and they went through that one to the street, where they entered a second carriage which drove away with them.

"Dear me!" said Adelina, shrugging her shoulders. "You deal in mysterious way in this country, señorita. Won't you tell me who you are?"

"Not now. We will not talk, please, until we have arrived."

"As you will."

The carriage was driven rapidly through two or three streets and at last stopped in front of another house; and here, to the utter amazement of Adelina, there was a repetition of the previous proceedings.

That is, they ascended the steps, entered the house with a key, passed through it into the yard at the rear, entered another house, and left that one for a third carriage.

"Truly," thought Adelina, "they have omitted no precaution to cover the trail—unless they have taken too many precautions."

But she made no remark; not even when they passed into still another house; as they entered the house Don José met them, and he bowed low over Adelina's hand.

"Welcome to my house," he said grandiloquently. "The way to get to it is devious, but you will find things to your taste, now that you are here, Inez."

He was without disguise now, and he seemed quite at his ease.

Adelina was conducted to the parlor floor, where she was asked to lay aside her things; and then the don duly and formally presented Emilia, who had taken her there.

A moment later the parlor door opened to admit Carmen and her mother, and they both came forward to greet her, though not with so much warmth as the don had shown.

But there was reason enough for constraint on their parts, Adelina thought. All three of the women should be jealous of her.

Mercedes, the wife, should be jealous because Inez Redenda had been at one time the idol of the man who was now her own husband. Carmen should be jealous, because she could see in this woman, called the patriot, and now returned from the dead, a possible rival to her exalted ambitions, and Emilia should be jealous on general principles.

Don José saw nothing of these undercurrents, if Adelina did; or if he saw them, he paid no heed to them.

"Our dinner will be served in a moment," said Don José. "We will not discuss serious affairs till afterward."

"Why need we discuss them at all?" asked Carmen, with a toss of her beautiful head.

Her father turned upon his daughter indignantly.

"Not discuss our political affairs with Inez Redenda?" he demanded. "Carmen, don't you know that there stands a woman who is the idol of all South America? I have only to let it be known that she lives, and that she is prepared to unite with us in our efforts, to add the spark to the powder which will set the southern half of this part of the world ablaze."

All this was as gall and wormwood to the daughter, but he did not heed; he went on:

"The men of those countries will flock around her standard as homing-pigeons seek the cotes where they belong. Ah! It is a great day! A great day indeed, when Inez Redenda returns to her own."

Inez shrugged her shoulders, and she replied coldly:

"It is not her own, now. It belongs to another."

Then, for the first time, Carmen's father understood.

Like many another man, he had brought two women together whom he believed would fall into each other's arms instantly; but, on the contrary, they stood ready, so far as he could see, to slash at each other's throats.

A servant saved the moment.

He opened a door somewhere at the rear of the room and announced in Spanish:

"Dinner is served."

Adelina will forever remember that function as one of the most interesting of her life.

She was conscious all the time of the utter hatred of Carmen Carerra, who did not at the time doubt that Adelina was indeed Inez Redenda, but who hated her none the less because she saw in her a rival to be feared.

Carmen could see in the woman who had been brought to that house by Don José one who would be a queen and an empress, if royalty were to be created, by right of power. Carmen, with all her wondrous beauty, could not hope to achieve in a day what this strange woman was supposed to have accomplished by years of suffering in a loathsome prison.

The atmosphere was surcharged with imminent possibilities.

An explosion of some sort threatened with every passing moment. Even the old don was distinctly uneasy.

But Adelina pretended to see none of these things.

She laughed, and talked animatedly; she told of fancied and imaginary experiences in her prison from which she had escaped. She told the tale she had arranged to account for that escape, and her familiarity with characters and places throughout the countries of South America stood her in good stead then.

The dinner was gotten through with somehow.

The moment came when they rose from the table and passed again into the room where Adelina had been first received.

Don José passed on through it, and went out. It was a weak act on his part, but who could blame him for it?

His wife followed him a moment later. Then Emilia withdrew.

Adelina and Carmen were left alone together.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOMAN AT BAY.

For a moment the two stood facing each other across the narrow space that separated them.

Adelina experienced a sense of amusement at the travesty of the scene which was to follow, although she was well aware that it was fraught with great danger.

Carmen Carerra was no mean antagonist; and Carmen Carerra hated, just now, with all the intensity of her Spanish-American nature.

She had taken up a position nearer the door than Adelina's, as if purposely to stand in the way of any escape from the approaching interview. Her form was drawn to its full height, her face was dark with passion, and her eyes gleamed with a cruelty which Adelina would not have thought them possible of attaining.

"Why are you here?" she demanded.

"That is not a pleasant question, señorita; and you do not ask it kindly," replied Adelina.

"Why are you here? Answer me, Inez Redenda."

"There seemed no place else for me to go—if I——"

"Well? If you—what?"

"If I did my whole duty," was the reply.

"Bah! Your duty! Your duty was to remain where you were, rotting in prison, rather than to dare to appear here to undo all that has been done."

"I shall not undo much that has been done."

"You lie! You know you lie!"

Adelina shrugged her shoulders. Carmen came a step nearer to her.

"Do you think that I will permit you to usurp my position?" she demanded. "Do you suppose for a moment that I will consent to stand idly aside and see you take the place that has been allotted to me?"

"I do not seek to take your place. That is the truth, señorita."

"It is *not* the truth. It is a lie. You know it is a lie. Down there, in your prison cell, some busybody has told you of our future empire, and you have plotted there, in secret, to seize the benefit of all that has been done. You think because you were once a queen among all revolutionists that you can be so again. You cannot! You shall not!"

"I tell you that I seek no such thing."

"Oh, don't lie to me. Don't you suppose that I understand?"

"You seem not to do so."

"Inez Redenda, I warn you! Go back to where you came from. Leave this affair in the hands of those who have brought it so nearly to success. You are not wanted here. Go back, I say."

"To go back there would be for Inez Redenda a return to prison."

"Go back. Go to your prison. Rot there, for all I care, but take yourself away from here, and do it speedily, or it will be the worse for you."

"Do you threaten me, Carmen?"

"Yes. I threaten you."

"With what?"

"This!"

Carmen withdrew one hand from the folds of her gown where it had been half-concealed, and she held aloft a gleaming weapon; a poniard, with a cross for its haft; with the hilt studded with jewels which reflected a thousand times the lights that shone in that room.

She was the personification of vengeance as she stood there, defying the woman who had so suddenly appeared, as she believed, to thwart all her fondest ambitions.

Carmen would not hesitate to make use of that dagger to kill, if such were necessary to the fulfilment of those ambitions. Adelina realized that much.

Adelina had thus far adopted the conciliatory course; now she took a new one.

"You are very foolish, Carmen," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "Do you suppose that I am afraid of such toys as that one you hold in your hand? Don't you know that I have seen many of them, and know their uses. I can forgive your passionate outburst, for I can understand it. I can understand, too, your attitude. What you say might indeed be true, if I had any such thought as you suggest. Go on with your schemes. Create your empire. Be a queen if you will. I do not envy you, and I would not be empress of your new country even if the people should offer to crown me so."

"You lie."

"That is a harsh word, Carmen. You have made use of it several times."

"I shall use it again, and again, and again. I hate you. I know what you are. You have come here to seize what I have created. I am the recognized leader of this movement, and you would depose me. I am to be the empress, and you would set me aside."

"You are mistaken. I have no such thought."

"Again you lie. All your words are lies. Your actions uphold my statement. You are here for the reasons I have stated; but you shall not succeed. I swear it!"

"Carmen, I——"

"Don't tell more lies. Don't plead with me. I hate you. I do not want you here. If you stay, I will kill you!"

"Nevertheless, I shall remain."

The statement was made quietly, and with decision. It told Carmen that the woman before her was not to be daunted by threats; that she had no fear of a display of weapons. She, too, tried another course.

"What have you done that you should come here and claim the fruits of all my labors?" she demanded.

"I do not do so."

"You do. You say that you understand how I feel. If so, you will know how necessary it is that you should get away, out of my sight, for if you do not I will kill. Did you hear what my father said? Of course you did hear. How could you help it?" She laughed wildly. "He said that the people will flock around your standard! *Your* standard, indeed! It is *mine!* He said your known presence would set the country ablaze. *Your* presence, indeed! *Mine* shall set it ablaze! He called *you* the spark that is to ignite those countries, and set them aflame."

"Well?"

"You shall not do it. I would use this poniard upon you, upon my own father, if necessary, rather than forget my ambition."

"I don't doubt you, Carmen."

"Neither should you. I mean what I say."

"You have not seemed to succeed very well of late, as leader," said Adelina, with cool assumption.

"What do you mean by that charge. Have a care what you say to me."

"Bah! Why should I care what I say to you? You have not been nice to me. You have done nothing but add insult to insult since I entered this house. When you did not do it with your tongue, you did it with your eyes, and in your manner. Am I such a weak woman that I am expected to brook such treatment from a chit of a girl? You warn *me* to have a care, so now I warn *you*. Don't try Inez Redenda too far. Such as she was might have served your ends much better as a friend than as a foe."

Carmen laughed derisively. Adelina continued:

"You might put it into the head of Inez Redenda to do the things you charge."

"That head would never live to wear a crown. I would sever it from your shoulders."

"You might try, but you would not succeed. You have not succeeded as a leader."

"That is the second time you have said that. What do you mean by it?"

"Your father has told me that until yesterday you all lived in the open, that you went about the streets of the city as you pleased; but that now—*you are here.*"

"What of it, pray?"

"Yours is the fault. You hold your personal ambi-

tions above all else. You seek to place a crown upon your head, and instead you catch a sweetheart. You have fallen in love with a man, and that man is not of your country, or of your political faith. Such a woman is not fit to be a leader of men. She can only lead one; and him not wisely."

Carmen had staggered backward as the force of this denunciation came upon her. She was so enraged now that she trembled.

"My father has told you that!" she cried out. "He has dared to tell you that?"

"I have not said that he told me. Your father is not my only source of information."

"Ah! You have already been in communication with others, I see. You have already begun your schemes for my undoing."

"I have done nothing of the sort."

But Carmen paid no heed. She went on wildly:

"Already you have seen others of our cause. Already many of them know that you have returned. Even now there is doubtless a movement on foot to supplant me with you. You have lost no time since your escape from prison; you——"

Carmen paused suddenly in what she was saying, and crouched low, like a tigress that is about to spring.

Her eyes were glowing like two live coals; her hands were clenched tightly together, until her fingers dug into her palms. She looked a veritable Fury just then.

Another idea had occurred to her at that moment. She gave voice and expression to it; and it made Adelina start with amazement, and also with the first real fright she had felt since she started out on this expedition.

"But *did* you escape from prison?" she cried, but with a depth of passion that reduced her voice almost to a whisper. "*Did* you? Why may you not be an impostor? Who are you? Are you Inez Redenda? Inez Redenda is dead! You cannot be she. I will not have it so. You are an impostor! You are not what you seem to be. You are an emissary of the enemy, sent here to betray us all. I see it now! Aye, I see it."

"You are mad!" cried Adelina, starting backward away from her.

"Aye, mad! That is the word. I *was* mad, to believe you. I am not mad now."

"Your father recognized me. I——"

"My father? What is he? A dolt! A senile old man in his dotage. Was he once and is he still in love with you, that he should take part with you in such a scheme as this one is? You shall both be executed. You shall both stand with your backs against a wall and be shot. I rule here, and you shall find it out."

Adelina breathed one little sigh of relief, although it was not a deep one; but she understood, now, that Carmen did not herself believe what she was saying; that she had made the charge, not because she believed it to be true, not because she had any real doubt of the identity of the woman who faced her, *but because in making the charge she saw a means out of the present predicament.*

Carmen knew that her own father was the only man in America at that moment who was capable of recognizing and identifying Inez Redenda; and she knew the disposition of her followers well enough to realize that she had but to drop a spark of suspicion among them to have it fan itself into a blaze at once.

And then it would be a sorry day for any person who tried to appear among the ranks of the conspirators by fraud.

"You are an impostor!" she cried again. "I will denounce you! My father has aided you in your imposture, and I will denounce him, also. You shall both die. You shall both be shot!"

"Carmen Carerra, listen to me!" cried Adelina; but the Spanish girl laughed wildly.

"I will denounce you," she repeated, "and fortunately the time is ripe for it. I will denounce you and him, and you shall both die!"

CHAPTER X.

A FORTUNATE MEETING.

Carmen Carerra did not wait to witness the effect of the words upon the supposed former patriot queen, Inez Redenda.

After uttering the terrible denunciation which had closed with such tragic words, and which left no doubt in the mind of Adelina that the ambitious young woman would not hesitate to sacrifice her own father, Carmen turned and left the room, banging the door after her, as if to emphasize the points she had made, and the viciousness of her present disposition.

Her departure left Adelina alone in practically the only room of that house she had entered, for it was the one in which she had been introduced on arriving there, and, save for her sojourn in the dining-room during the meal, the only one she had seen.

The interview through which she had just passed with Carmen had the result of perplexing Adelina greatly. Up to the time of it the character of Inez Redenda, which she was playing, seemed to have no

flaw in it, and there had appeared to be no impediment to its success.

Now, however, everything was changed.

The position taken by Carmen was a perfectly logical one from her standpoint.

She saw in Inez Redenda another ambitious woman like herself, and one who, having once been the idol of all revolutionists, had now returned, after many years in prison eager to assume her own position with them; eager to lead, and naturally quite as eager to reap the fruits of such leadership.

Adelina did not believe that Carmen Carerra seriously doubted the identity of Inez Redenda.

The charge that she was an impostor, which, although literally true, as we know, was nevertheless only the result of an impulse on Carmen's part to grasp at any straw which might rid herself of this interloper of a woman who had so suddenly loomed in the horizon of her ambition.

But it endangered Adelina's position none the less because the charge was not sincere. The inflammable and impetuous character of the men engaged in the conspiracy would be easily influenced with suspicion by any such charge made by Carmen.

The mere whisper that Inez Redenda, who had appeared so mysteriously in New York, was an impostor would have enough effect to interfere seriously with all that Adelina had intended to do while playing that character.

When Adelina was left alone she remained for a long time standing where Carmen last saw her, wondering what it was best to do next, for she realized that now very little time would be afforded her to complete her task.

If, as she suspected, Nick Carter was a prisoner somewhere at that house, no time must be lost in seeking him.

It seemed strange that a woman should have to go to the rescue of Nick Carter, but we must not forget that a mouse once helped a lion by gnawing the rope with which the king of beasts was confined, and Adelina knew that if she could free Nick Carter just enough to permit him to use his own great strength it would be sufficient.

Presently she approached the door, and, opening it a little, stood there listening. But she heard no sound save the noises from the streets outside and the occasional opening and closing of a door somewhere below-stairs in the servant's quarters.

She wondered what had become of Don José, and of Carmen's mother and sister; but she neither saw nor heard signs of any member of the household as she listened; and, emboldened by this she approached the stairs and there paused to listen again; then she ascended them slowly.

The house was not unlike the characteristic New York house in its interior arrangements.

When Adelina reached the landing of the first flight, she found herself in an ordinary hallway of the second floor, off which several doors connected with rooms.

The front room had its door standing open and Adelina, after perceiving that no one occupied it, passed inside.

It was unquestionably the apartment occupied by Don José and his wife, as various articles testified.

One hasty glance around it was sufficient, and she went again into the hallway, and noticed at once that while she had been in the front room the door which communicated between the rear one and the hallway had been partly opened as if to admit more air, for she could see no person near it.

She passed forward silently and peered through the aperture thus created; and then she gave a gasp of surprise.

Seated near a window, engaged in reading, and with the glare of the electric light shining full upon his countenance, was Jack Durland.

He seemed not to be a prisoner; indeed he was entirely at liberty, so far as appearances went.

The time was yet early in the evening, and Durland was fully dressed. He held a half-smoked cigar between his fingers, and his attention was riveted upon the book he had been reading.

Adelina studied the situation for a moment, and then, relying upon her own resourcefulness, she passed silently into the room and closed the door behind her, turning the key of the lock as she did so.

It was the click made by the turning key which startled Durland into the knowledge that he was not alone, and he raised his eyes quickly to discover, standing midway between him and the door, a woman whom he believed he had never seen before; for although he knew Adelina perfectly well by sight, he had not recognized her in her present character of Inez Redenda.

He evinced no great amount of surprise, however, or, if he did, it was not manifested. He spoke to her in Spanish, rising hastily from his chair as he did so, and assuming an attitude of courteous expectancy.

Adelina regarded him in silence.

For she had forgotten her disguise, and when she entered the room where he was seated it was with the expectation of being instantly recognized. The fact that he did not know her reminded her of who and what she appeared to be.

Nevertheless, she carried out her original design, believing that she had not misread the character of Jack Durland, and being thoroughly confident that she could rely upon his chivalry and his innate sense of honorable dealing.

"Mr. Durland," she said, in English, and in her natural tone of voice.

He started violently. He took a step toward her, and paused. He passed one hand across his brow wearily.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in a low tone.

"I am Adelina Garvan," she responded instantly, acting upon one of those impulses of her which amounted to inspiration.

"Mrs. Garvan!" he ejaculated. "Why, I thought ——"

"You thought that I was another?" she smiled at him.

"Yes," he acknowledged.

"You thought I was the Inez Redenda of whom you have heard."

"Yes."

"I am."

Durland shrugged his shoulders, and smiled.

"But for your voice I could not believe you are Mrs. Garvan," he told her, still maintaining the low tone he had first used. "But your voice assures me of your identity, although, outwardly, you are a different person altogether."

"I am Adelina Garvan," she assured him.

"But why are you here?"

"Do you ask me that?" she demanded, approaching nearer to him. "Do you ask me that, knowing that Nick Carter has fallen into the power of these people, and that they will sacrifice his life? But I admit, Mr. Durland, that I am astounded beyond expression to find you, as I do now, apparently in full possession of your liberty, with your arms and your strength free to use, sitting idly in this room reading a book, while the man who has befriended you in the past is somewhere under this very roof, doubtless bound, helpless, and a prisoner, and doomed to execution. Has the love, so suddenly born within you, for Carmen Carerra made a coward of you, John Durland? Has the passion, so strangely engendered in your soul, deprived it and you of all manhood? Have you no spark of the honor of which you boasted?"

At first, under her scathing denunciation, he shrank from her, but as she continued to speak he folded his arms across his breast, and replied calmly:

"I do not in the least know what you mean, Mrs. Garvan. Nick Carter is not here."

"He is here."

"I was told that he was not here."

"Then you were deceived."

"Do you know that to be true, Mrs. Garvan?"

"I know it as positively as one can know a thing not seen or heard with ones own eyes or ears."

"I was assured that Mr. Carter had been set at liberty."

"Then you were assured of a lie."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No; only that I believe him to be under this roof."

"Do you know that his life is in any danger?"

"I do; and you know it also, if you stop to think for a moment of the desperate character of these people with whom you are involved."

He was silent and after a moment she continued, speaking scornfully:

"And I find you here, idly engaged in reading a book, and smoking a cigar, when all this——"

Durland raised one hand in deprecation of what she was saying.

"Wait a moment, please, Mrs. Garvan," he said. "There are things about this present circumstance which you do not understand."

"Yes?" she asked him.

"I was seated in this room, as you discovered me, apparently untrammeled, because I had given my word not to leave the room without permission to do so. But when I gave that promise, I was assured before I made it that I was the only prisoner here. I was told, and I was made to feel certain, that Nick Carter had given his word to the conspirators not to molest them more."

"And you believed that?" she asked him scornfully.

"I was compelled to do so."

"Compelled!"

"Perhaps constrained would be a better word. I was constrained to believe what I was told."

"And now——"

"Well?"

"Does not the fact that you were deceived into making the promise to remain in this room release you from that promise?"

"If you can convince me that I was deceived, it does," he replied, with decision, and with calmness.

"Will you help me to find Nick Carter?"

"First, prove to me that he is in the power of these people, and I will not hesitate to do so."

"Do you need proof more than my assured word that I speak the truth?"

"No, madam; not if you are convinced that your assurance is doubly sure."

"I am so convinced."

"Then, so be it. I will go with you, and I will do everything in my power to prove to Nick Carter that I am not the ingrate you have just declared me to be."

Adelina looked up at him and smiled.

"Mr. Durland," she said, "if I had really supposed you to be less than my first estimation of your character promised, I would not have betrayed myself to you when I entered this room. I might readily have passed for Inez Redenda."

"You might, indeed."

"I am alone in this house. I am strangely in the power of these people, myself, if by any chance they should penetrate my disguise. My life would not be worth the snap of your fingers, even though I am a woman, and although I feel self-reliant and sufficient unto myself, I must still depend somewhat upon your protection, now that I have found you."

"You will make no mistake in doing that, Mrs. Garvan. Jack Durland has always been much that was reckless, but there is something good left to me, nevertheless. Shall we begin our search for Nick Carter now?"

"Yes; does your knowledge of this house suggest to you where we can best undertake it?"

"I don't think my knowledge is more profound than your own," he replied, smiling.

"Then, come," she answered him. "I believe that we are for the moment the sole tenants of this building, with the possible exception of the servants in the basement. I am convinced that Don José and his daughters have gone out."

"I know they have," said Durland. "They will not return for an hour or more."

They left the room together then to begin their search for Nick Carter.

CHAPTER XI.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL.

If the reader will remember the route by which Adelina arrived at the house in which she had now encountered Jack Durland, he will be reminded of the care with which these leaders of the conspiracy had concealed themselves from search, and of the utter indifference to expense they had manifested in doing so.

If Don José, or any one belonging to him, were seen and recognized on the street, and if he were followed to the first house, he would not be there, nor in the house behind it, when search for him should follow. If, perchance, he could be traced beyond that second house to the others, again the pursued would have even more time to disappear, and thus effectually making an escape, or, at least, securing time enough for getting so far in advance of pursuers that there would be little hope of overtaking those who were seeking to elude arrest.

Adelina, at first amazed by all this ceremony in conducting her to the retreat of Don José, had decided that these houses belonged to sympathizers with, or participators in, the conspiracy, and had only been used as a means of concealment for the retreat of their principal leaders.

It goes without saying that Durland had been taken to his quasi-imprisonment by the same route, and that he had arrived at the same conclusion Adelina had done.

The two paused in the hallway outside of the room where Adelina had found Durland, and she said to him:

"Are you sure that Carmen and the others have left the house, Mr. Durland?"

"Quite sure; she, herself, told me that they were going out."

"Do you know where?"

"No."

"For what purpose?"

"Yes."

"May I ask what it was?"

"To attend a consultation of the leaders of the conspiracy."

"You were not invited to attend it yourself?"

"I was invited, but I declined."

"May I ask why?"

"Because I have adhered to the position I assumed when once before they threatened to take the life of Nick Carter. I am not an ingrate. I have not forgotten that he befriended me when I needed a friend. I refused to take any oath of theirs until she should first take oath to me that he was safely at his home and would not be further molested."

"She refused to take the oath?"

"No; she delayed it. She said she would take it in the morning."

"And you believed her?"

"Yes."

"Were you brought here as I was brought—through many houses?"

"Yes; through a number of them before we reached this one."

"Are those the residences of other conspirators?"

"I think so. It is likely."

"May I trust you, Mr. Durland, to go thoroughly into this search with me?"

"I think you may," he replied smilingly.

"I am assured," she told him, "that I have very little time in which to accomplish what I have set out to do. Carmen saw in me only the Inez Redenda of the past, who was once the idol of all South American conspirators and revolutionists, and who has risen from the dead, apparently, to come here and usurp Carmen's place. And for that reason she hated me. She also feared me. For the accumulation of reasons I have named, she threatened to denounce me as an impostor, although she does not really believe me to be one. But the effect of such a denunciation would be the same as if she were sincere. Suspicion would be instantly aroused against me, and I would be given no opportunity to play the part I have selected. We must, therefore, act hastily and completely. What is done must be done now."

"I quite agree with you," said Durland.

"Then come. We will begin at the top of this house and search every room of it. Then, if we have not been successful, we will pass to the next one, and the next, and so on, until we have searched them all."

"Suppose we are not successful even then?"

"In that case," she replied calmly, "we must find other means, and new methods, to continue our search."

We need not go into detail regarding their painstaking search of the rooms of that particular house.

It was, apparently, merely the living-quarters of Don José Carerra and his immediate family; and it was not difficult to determine which of the members of that family occupied the different rooms, for each apartment was characteristic in its way.

Carmen's room was decorated with pistols and swords, and other munitions of war; upon the walls were pictures and photographs of court-scenes, and of members of royal families; and everywhere about it were indications of the "dream of empire" indulged in by its occupant.

Emilia's room was littered with books, French and Spanish novels, writing-material, and other things to indicate that her mind was filled with the lighter things of life rather than with its responsibilities.

They left the house through the back door, crossed the yards by passing through the gate in the fence, and as silently and secretly as possible entered the second one.

This they believed to be occupied by another family,

but they soon discovered that whoever the tenants of it were they were absent for the time being. Not even a servant barred their further progress, and so here they made the same thorough search that had been devoted to the first house on their list.

The result of it was the same.

No trace of the detective to indicate even that he had been confined there was found.

When the moment came to leave this house, in order to go to the third one, our two friends were confronted by a dilemma upon which they had not figured.

They did not know where that third house was located. All they did know was that it was in another street, and not very far distant.

They had been through the house from top to bottom, and had paused just inside the front door of it, on the point of leaving, when they were confronted by this dilemma, which had not until then occurred to either of them.

In fact, each had supposed the other would know where to find it; each had believed the other to be aware of the route by which the final house had been approached.

"We seem to be up against it," said Durland, when they paused, dismayed by the perplexity of their position.

Adelina was about to reply, but she paused, with her lips parted, before speaking the words she was on the point of uttering.

She reached up and pressed her forefinger against Durland's lips, to enjoin silence, and then catching him by the arm, drew him backward into the parlor, the door of which stood partly ajair, quite near to them.

Her quick ears had detected the sound of approaching footsteps, and they had no more than concealed themselves when the scraping of a key was heard in the lock of the front door, which opened to admit no less a person than Carmen Carerra herself.

She paused just inside the door to close it softly after her; then she sped away through the hall and descended the stairs to the basement, going so rapidly that it would have been impossible to follow her without detection, even had either of them attempted to do so.

But Adelina would have made the attempt had not Durland restrained her.

"Carmen is returning for something she has forgotten, I think," he said, in a low tone.

"But if that is so, she will discover that we have left the house," said Adelina.

"Perhaps so," said Durland; and he shrugged his shoulders. "On the other hand, she may not do so. She may only visit her own room, secure what she has forgotten, and return. At all events, we can do nothing more than wait. And then, if she returns this way——"

"We will follow her to the house we seek," exclaimed Adelina.

"We will," said Durland; and he shut his teeth tightly together with a determined snap.

They had not long to wait.

The characterization of Carmen's passage through the house, given by Durland, proved to be correct, for it was not long before they saw her returning across the yards—saw her through the window at the rear of the house, where they waited and watched while she was gone.

"Come!" exclaimed Durland, seizing Adelina by the arm. "We must gain the street before she does so."

They fled through the hall, out at the front door, and down the steps; and they had crossed the street to the other side of it before Carmen appeared.

She did not glance in either direction, but took her way rapidly along the street, and seemed not to suspect that she might be observed, or followed. It was evident that she had not discovered the absence of Durland and the supposed Inez Redenda from that other house.

They saw her mount another flight of steps and pass beyond a door, and instantly when she did so, Durland wheeled and ran with all speed away from it, greatly to the amazement of Adelina, who could only stare at him in wondering alarm, until he vanished.

Her first thought was that he had taken this means of deserting her, and she was more angry than dismayed by the occasion of it.

Turning, she climbed the steps beyond which Carmen had disappeared, and paused there, dismayed by the thought that she had no means of gaining access to this house, the door of which was locked against her.

She was not possessed of the skill to open it with a picklock, even had she been possessed of such an instrument. She could only step back again, and jot down the number of the house, and then hurry toward the corner, where from a lamp-post, she knew she could obtain the name of the street; for you must remember that Adelina had no idea in what part of the city she happened to be at that moment.

Fortunately she took the direction which Durland had followed when he ran away, for that corner was much nearer to her, and she had paused to read the name on the lamp-post when she heard the sound of running footsteps approaching her; and turned to face Durland again.

"Come!" he said to her. "The way is easy now;" and he grasped her by the arm, and started running again, and so half-dragged her around into another street.

Durland had used his wits when Carmen disappeared.

He remembered that she would pass through one house into another, and he had sped around to that other one to intercept her when she should come out.

He had arrived there just as she appeared, and in time to notice that she came only as far as the front door of it to speed a parting messenger whom she was sending away, and then to return inside the house again.

CHAPTER XII.

SAVED BY ADELINA.

Durland had not waited to tell Adelina what his purpose was, because there was not time to do so. He had taken the chance that he could return before she would go away, and he had found her, as we have seen.

He now knew the location of all the houses, although Adelina did not; for Durland, much better acquainted with the streets of New York than Adelina was, had known where that first house to which he had been taken was located. And he knew that the second one should be directly behind it, on the next street.

But he hoped it would not be necessary to seek those other houses in order to find what he sought.

There was a suspicion in his mind regarding the purpose of Carmen's absenting herself from the particular house where he had been a self-constituted prisoner, and he believed it to be that the meeting of the leaders of the conspiracy for that night was to determine ultimately the fate of the detective.

He judged that, in the light of what Adelina had told him; and he was angered by it all; angered that Carmen should have deceived him, when he trusted her so fully. The thought of it changed him, and rendered him once more loyal to all that he had once promised Nick Carter.

The night was a dark one, as has been said.

The fog that hung over the city had thickened perceptibly by now, so that a person could not be seen, or at least recognized, unless met at close quarters.

They paused, presently, before the house where Durland had seen Carmen come to the front door to send away a messenger; to send some one away who doubtless belonged in that house, since he dared to leave by the front exit.

The man had disappeared now. The steps of the house were deserted. The door was closed, and no light shone above it. Even the windows of the residence gave no outward sign of occupancy.

But Durland did not hesitate. He ran up the front steps, and Adelina followed him. Then, from one of his pockets he took a huge bunch of keys and began cautiously to try them, one by one, seeking that which would open the door.

After a little he secured a small file from another pocket and began to work slowly and silently with one of the keys, and at the same time he whispered to Adelina:

"When I was a boy I learned the trade of locksmith. It has served me well more than once, and it will do so again."

He was not mistaken in this assertion, for presently the lock gave before his efforts, and the outer, or vestibule door, swung open before them.

"The same key will fit the other lock," he said. "Do you insist upon entering with me, or will you trust me to proceed alone?"

"I will go with you," she replied. "I trust you, Mr. Durland; but I will go with you."

"There may be danger in there—grave danger."

"I do not fear it."

He offered no further objection, but, using great care, he inserted the key in the lock, turned it, and pushed the door ajar.

The hall was dark and they entered at once; then paused to listen while Durland softly closed the door.

Since entering the house they had not heard a sound, but now Adelina, whose hearing seemed more acute than that of her companion, thought she caught the murmur of voices near at hand, and she dropped to the floor and placed her ear close to the sill of the door which communicated with the parlor.

"They are in there," she whispered, rising and putting her lips close to Durland's ear as she spoke. "There are several of them; possibly many. What shall we do now?"

By way of reply he grasped her arm and led her through the hallway toward the rear, where a glass door opened upon what was doubtless the back parlor of the house. There was no light in that room, for otherwise it would have been revealed through the ground glass of the door.

Neither was the door fastened. It gave readily enough before the pressure that Durland put upon it, and presently he stepped across the threshold into the room; and now the voices, a moment ago inaudible to him, were plainly distinct. It was Carmen who was speaking, and they heard her say, with decision:

"There must be no more delay. Let Nick Carter's fate be decided at once, for after that I will have another matter of even greater importance to bring before this meeting; and by that time Pancho will have returned with the information I have sent him to obtain."

Pancho was doubtless the messenger whom Durland had seen depart from the house; at least, such was Durland's thought as he crept forward, followed by Adelina.

Portières hung in the wide doorway which connected the front and back parlors. These had been drawn, but it was not difficult to see, and Durland and Adelina both saw plainly into the lighted room.

Seven men were there, not counting Don José, who seemed to preside at the meeting, and Nick Carter, who was tightly strapped to the chair upon which he was seated. Also, Carmen's mother and sister were there, although they were withdrawn from the remainder of the group, and sat at a distance, taking apparently no part in the proceedings.

Adelina pressed her lips closely against Durland's ear, and she breathed, rather than whispered:

"We are in time."

He nodded. It was not the time to converse, and he nudged her warningly to be silent.

"This man was lately condemned to death by a full meeting of the Reds," Carmen continued. "There should be no delay in carrying that sentence into execution." She rose from her chair and stood before

it, facing them. She lifted her right arm, and she said, speaking slowly: "As your commanding officer, with full power, I direct that within the hour Nicholas Carter be taken to the cellar of this house and there be put to death in the manner prescribed by our constitution for all traitors and spies against the peace and security of our empire. Is there any one who has aught to say in objection?"

"I might raise an objection, only it would be a waste of breath," said Nick; but no one paid the slightest attention to him.

"There being no objection," Carmen continued, "we may as well proceed with the execution at once. Three of you shall do the deed; only one of the rifles will contain a bullet. You will all aim at his heart when you shoot. We will all draw lots now, I among you, to determine which of us shall be executioners. I have prepared a bag containing nineteen beans, three of which are black. Whosoever draws the black beans shall serve. See! Here is the bag. Here are the white and the black beans. I place them inside the bag—so. Now, if you are ready, we will draw."

It was an interesting scene, although fraught with such tragic meaning. Durland was watching it breathlessly when he felt that Adelina was tugging at his sleeve. Again she pressed her lips against his ear, and this time she whispered:

"There is some one in the front hall. I heard some one there."

Instantly Durland stepped silently backward toward the door which opened upon the hall. As he crossed the threshold he encountered a blinding flash of light which struck him in the face; and at the same instant he heard his own name pronounced in an astonished whisper.

Then he was seized on either side, and held in a grip of iron, while a voice whispered in his ear:

"If you give an alarm, Durland, I'll kill you!"

It was the voice of Patsy. And in the meantime another flash had revealed Adelina to Conner, who was the one who held it, and who had discovered Durland to Patsy. But neither of the two had seen Adelina in her disguise as Inez Redenda, and in that instant flash of the light they could not recognize her.

But she lost no time in making herself known, for she had heard Patsy's low-toned warning to Durland, and she started forward and threw her arms around Patsy's neck, whispering rapidly into his ear such words as made him speedily acquainted with all that was taking place, and with what had happened up to that moment.

It required but a few seconds for this.

"There are three of us here," said Patsy, in a whisper, "and——"

"Four," corrected Adelina.

"There are four of us here. There are nine inside that room, for two of the women need not be counted. We will make them think that the house is surrounded. Come, Conner, guard the door which opens upon the hall. Durland, you and Adelina follow me. We will enter through the curtained doorway between the two rooms."

He did not stop to ask if they were armed. Indeed it did not occur to Patsy to do so. He would have faced the situation alone at that moment when such dire danger threatened his chief.

He sprang into the back parlor, and to the curtained doorway. He thrust the curtains aside—and he stood in the aperture, his arms raised, each hand holding a weapon pointed at those persons inside the room, and he cried out:

"Hands up! And don't any of you try to resist. There are plenty with me who will see to it that none of you escape this time."

The effect of a bomb would not have been more astounding. Not one of the eight men thought of resistance. They had believed themselves thoroughly secure in that house. They had not thought of such a thing as being followed there, or traced there.

Then Conner's voice sounded from the other doorway.

"We've got 'em!" he called out, apparently to men who were behind him; and to those inside the room he added; "Your man Pancho brought us here. You'd better give up without a struggle. It will go easier with you if you do."

And then Jack Durland stepped forward into the middle of the floor. His eyes were fixed upon Carmen, who shrank backward before his gaze.

"You deceived me," he said. It was all, but it was eloquent; and he passed on directly to Nick Carter's side, and, with a knife, severed the bonds that held the detective to the chair.

"I brought you to this, Nick Carter," he said. "Now I free you. The woman I thought I loved deceived me."

He seized upon the cords he had cut away from the detective, and turned with them in his hand toward Carmen again. She was gazing dumbly at him, and did not resist when he passed the cord around her wrists and tied it there. Then once again he addressed the detective.

"Take her," he said. "She is your prisoner. I heard the threat that was just made against you. I will be a witness to that effect. The conspiracy for an empire ends here."

It did, too. Without Carmen Carerra to lead, it was nothing. Three days later, General Ignacio Revuelta sent word to the governments he represented that there was nothing more to fear.

While all this was happening, Adelina had rapidly restored her appearance to something resembling her own beauteous self, and now Nick Carter drew her forward and kissed her on the forehead, and he said:

"I think, Adelina, that I owe my life to you."

THE END.

The next number, 623, will be "The Midnight Marauders; or, Nick Carter's Telephone Mystery."

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BURIED ALIVE IN QUICKSAND.

"Hark!"

"What's the matter?"

"I thought I heard a lion."

The two inmates of the little cabin listened intently. Their names were Tom Fraser and Hendrik Schloss. Tom, with his companion, who was eight years older than he, was traveling southward through the Cape on business connected with his father's extensive ostrich-farms. They had kept the Limpopo River on their right for many miles, but with the idea of saving time they had crossed it early that day in an attempt to bring off a short cut. But progress on the verge of the Kalahari Desert—the great land of thirst—was slow, and darkness had overtaken them.

Fortunately, they had come upon a disused cabin in a *boscl*, or thicket of brushwood; and having tethered their tired horses to its walls they had taken refuge inside.

"Don't speak of such things," begged Tom earnestly, fanning into a flame a pile of sticks and thorn scrub in the middle of the earth floor, with an opening overhead by way of a chimney. "There is not room in here for our horses as well as ourselves."

Hendrik, who had been looking out at the door of the cabin, came in. He had seen nothing save the shadows of bushes cast by the sinking crescent of moon; had heard nothing save the sigh of the night wind over the flat-topped hillocks, and the far-distant cry of a prowling hycna.

Ten minutes later and they sat down to their supper. The meal over, Tom drew from a pocket a well-thumbed newspaper. He said, folding a leaf down:

"Here is a portrait of Philip van Raas, who has got away from the diamond country with a stolen diamond of ninety-three carats."

Hendrik's eyes flashed.

"That is something like a diamond," he answered. "But he will not get far."

"Wait a bit. He has got far," said Tom, reading. "Crossed the Vaal River fifteen days back; supposed to have dodged into Bechuanaland, and they are looking for him farther north than we have come from. He is supposed to be hiding in the Karroo bush. Here follows a description of the rascal. Among other things he has a livid scar extending from his left wrist to the elbow. I wonder——"

He broke off, and with reason. Somewhere out in the night a lion was roaring horribly. The challenging sound began with a deep purring mutter, rising and growing into a hoarse, earth-shaking volume of defiance.

The horses could be heard tugging madly at their tether, and uttering whinnying cries of terror.

"We must give that beast something to howl about," said Tom, and, snatching up his rifle, he went to the door, which he flung open. Hendrik followed to soothe the scared animals.

The hyenas no longer lurked near. They had vanished at the presence of a much more terrible enemy. Tom stepped out a dozen yards, peering into the shadows. The voice of Hendrik called to him warningly:

"Be careful!"

Suddenly Tom heard the lion roar again. Instinctively he looked in the direction of the sound, though he was aware that a lion is never just where his voice appears to be. He perceived something move quickly, and he was on the point of firing when that something leaped to its feet, and a man came tearing toward him.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" he cried.

"Who are you?" demanded Tom, his rifle ready.

"A half-starved man who has been lost in the bush for three days," was the whining answer. "There has been a lion stalking me since dusk!"

There was no mistaking the note of terror in the man's voice. Small wonder! He had been stalked, as he said, by a lion for two dreadful hours.

"Get inside the cabin," cried Tom. "Ah, there you go, my beauty!"

The latter remark was addressed to a huge slinking object a score of yards distant. It was an immense yellow-maned lion, and it was in a distinctly bad temper at being disappointed of its supper. It crouched behind a bush, lashing the dust with its tail.

Tom stepped to left, then to right, trying to perceive the beast's eyes. And suddenly he saw them flash green as they reflected the light streaming through the open door. He fired right between them.

There was a nerve-shattering roar; the high leap of a tawny body that writhed in mid-air; a series of frightful growls and gnashings and chokings. Finally the sounds died away.

"That settles him!" said Tom grimly, and he turned and went back into the cabin.

As Tom set eyes on the unexpected visitor he told himself that he was a rough character, to say the least of it. The man's face was still white with fear, and it was anything but an agreeable type of countenance. His eyes were bloodshot, and he squinted horribly. Though his frame showed that he was naturally a man of great strength, yet he had clearly been through wasting privations.

"He looks as if he had escaped from a prison," thought Tom. "That yarn about his having lost himself will scarcely do. He has been hiding. We shall have to keep an eye on him."

As Tom exchanged glances with Hendrik he perceived that the latter shared his suspicions, and was none too well pleased with the looks or manner of their guest.

The stranger declared that he was starving, and bore out his words by the way he attacked the food set before him. The friends sat and smoked and watched him. He ate like a savage. Presently, feeling the intense heat that came from the glowing pile on the floor, he tugged off the torn, greasy jacket he was wearing, flinging it into a corner of the hut. The act disclosed a red sort of hunting-shirt; and it disclosed more than that.

On his left wrist, extending upwards to the elbow, was a terrible scar of some old wound!

The two friends saw it simultaneously. Their eyes met, and said plainer than words:

"Van Raas!"

It was a startling discovery. Van Raas was known to be a man of the most dangerous character. All who had tried to capture him had burned their fingers pretty severely. He had even shot dead a mounted police officer who had driven

him to bay. There was a reward of a hundred pounds offered for information that would lead to his arrest.

Tom said, in a casual sort of manner: "I'll just see that the horses are safe for the night," and went out, making a swift sign to Hendrik to follow. The latter waited a few minutes, then got up, yawned loudly, and strolled outside the cabin.

"It's the diamond-thief, right enough," said Tom, in a hoarse whisper.

"I think so," answered Hendrik.

"Well, look here, I've thought it over, and I'll tell you what I mean to do. We must wait until he's asleep, then I'll slip out and ride to Five Pools. I can get there in less than a couple of hours, and will be back with help before daybreak. There's a hundred pounds reward, you know, which will mean fifty apiece."

"But suppose he wakes and finds you gone?" demurred Hendrik. "He isn't the sort to think twice of sticking a knife into a fellow's ribs."

"You have your revolver, and you must not let him be first. I am quite willing that you should ride to the town, but the one is as risky as the other, for the moon has set, and like as not I shall be tumbled off by a lion. But he won't wake easily when once he gets asleep. You saw yourself how exhausted he is."

This plan was agreed upon. On returning to the cabin, any doubts as to the drowsiness of their guest were at once dissipated. He had already flung himself down close to the smoldering fire, his coat folded under his head, and was giving most unmistakable signs of the depth of his slumber.

Tom delayed not a second. He saddled his horse, mounted, and rode off. He had but the stars for a guide, but they shone with brilliant splendor in the dark-blue dome of the sky. A burning breath from the Kalahari blew in from the west, but the rider turned his back upon it, urging his animal forward as fast as he dared, holding his revolver ready for any emergency.

Hendrik Schloss was left alone with the sleeping man, whom he regarded long and critically. He was telling himself that, concealed on the fellow, was a peerless diamond worth a fortune.

This thought served more to keep Hendrik from nodding than any sense of peril. He began to wonder just where the diamond was hidden, and what it looked like.

"It is probably in that coat under his head," murmured the watcher.

The man snored louder than ever.

At that instant Hendrik perceived what he had not noticed before—that the right hand of the sleeper was closed upon something tied up in a fragment of sheepskin. As Hendrik observed this, his eyes glistened, and he drew in his breath sharply.

"The diamond!"

He muttered the words, strongly excited. He had turned very pale. Temptation was whispering in his ear, making his heart beat furiously. If he could secure the diamond, and hide it, who could accuse him?

If!

Hendrik drew nearer to the slumberer. The fingers of the right hand did not seem to be clenched very tightly over the object in the palm. Hendrik stooped down. With his thumb and forefinger he took hold of the prize and tugged gently.

The man moved slightly, and growled out something. Hendrik drew back. He was now ghastly pale, and shaking with excitement. Holding his revolver in his left hand he renewed the attempt to get the diamond. He tugged once more, then gave a sharp pull. The next moment he held the thing sure enough, but the man awoke and fixed his eyes upon his disturber!

One look he gave, then leaped to his feet with a terrible oath.

Terror-stricken, scarcely knowing what he did, Hendrik struck wildly with the butt-end of his revolver. The other received the blow upon his temple, and down he went with a crash, lying white and motionless upon the floor.

Utterly unnerved, Hendrik rushed from the hut. His guilt had cowed him completely, and he acted in a panic of fear and horror. He had got what he wanted, but he told himself that he had killed Van Raas. In a moment he himself had become the fugitive, for there remained but one thing for him to do: he must fly!

Hendrik Schloss rode away from the lonely cabin as if death were at his horse's heels.

In a moment the darkness swallowed horse and rider. The animal seemed to share its master's panic, for it galloped madly forward through the bush, escaping a headlong fall by a series of miracles. For nearly an hour the wild flight continued.

Suddenly the horse came to a stop with such abruptness that its rider was all but flung. With its fore legs firmly planted, its nostrils dilated, and its sweating flanks rising and falling, it appeared conscious of danger close by, and refused to move.

"Get on, you beast!" shouted Hendrik. But neither words nor blows availed to persuade the animal to proceed.

Hendrik pulled himself together. The first shock of panic was over, and if he could he would have returned to the hut. After all, the man might not have been killed. He might have brought him round, given him the stolen diamond, and turned him adrift.

"I have acted like a fool, a madman," thought Hendrik bitterly.

It was impossible to find the hut again. He had ridden through the dark with no heed as to the direction his horse had taken.

Absolute blackness lay all around him; and some mysterious peril close at hand. What could it be?

He listened intently, expecting to hear the roar of a lion shatter the silence, but no sound came. He could feel his horse quaking with terror.

Hendrik dismounted, holding his revolver in his right hand, straining his eyes into the darkness. He took three steps forward, but at the third his foot touched only emptiness!

He made a desperate effort to regain his balance. Too late! He shot downward, through a void, the pistol flying from his hand and a sharp cry ringing from his lips.

The horse had scented the deadly peril before and had stopped almost on the brink of the drop.

The descent was sheer, though not more than a dozen feet deep. It was really a gully, at the bottom of which a fair-sized stream ran in the cooler seasons. The stream was at no point very deep, but in one place was very treacherous. This was where it filtered slowly through a wide stretch of fine sand, yellow as gold. Woe betide any who set foot on its surface, for it was a quicksand of unknown depth.

Into this quicksand Hendrik Schloss had tumbled.

He fell prone, and with the attempt to rise his legs at once were gripped by the treacherous sand. He realized instantly that his only chance was to fling the rest of his body forward, to extend his arms, and to keep still.

Then he sent a wild cry for help ringing through the waste.

It was not answered. He repeated it a hundred times, shouted until his throat was hoarse, but there was no response.

His legs had sunk to the knees. He could feel the pressure tightening upon them, drawing him steadily under. For a moment he gave way to panic, fought and struggled madly, with the result that he sank still deeper, midway up his thighs.

Hendrik ceased his worse than unavailing efforts. A groan of agony broke from his lips.

Dawn was breaking. As little twilight before the full day as after it on the African plains. The sun rose rapidly.

By that time Hendrik had sunk almost waist-deep. He felt that he was lost.

He heard a screaming high overhead, and looking up he saw carrion birds swinging in the blue vault. They began to swoop down toward him, their fierce eyes fixed upon him, menacing him with their curved beaks.

Down and down! He had sunk as far as his chest. He still kept his arms free; still sent his hoarse, despairing cries for help that would not come. Invisible hands appeared to be dragging him down. Before fifteen minutes were passed he would have vanished from sight, sucked down by this terrible morass, and no one would ever know what had become of him.

A frenzy of horror swept through his brain, and he uttered one final yell, into which he put all the strength that remained to him.

Suddenly his heart almost stopped still, then pounded furiously against his ribs. Surely his cry had been answered!

He tried to renew it, but only a husky whisper issued from his dry throat. The suspense was intolerable. He felt that his senses were leaving him, that if help came he would not be able to respond to it.

Suddenly the vultures flew up as they caught sight of an intruder. A moment later a horseman appeared on the bank of the gully. A cry of horror broke frim his lips.

The rider was Tom Fraser.

As his eyes fell on his companion he grasped the situation and perceived that not an instant must be wasted. Yet how could he save him? He could not descend into the quicksand, and he had no rope to fling to the other's aid. His horse's reins would do, but they were not long enough.

Tom cast his eyes round in agonized bewilderment, and they fell upon Hendrik's horse, that was quietly grazing near with trailing bridle.

"I can save him, but I must be quick about it!" gasped Tom.

In less than two minutes he had whipped off the reins of both horses and flung a noose. Hendrik caught it at the second attempt, and had just strength to get it under his arms. Then followed a terrific struggle. Slowly and surely his body was drawn from the grip of the quicksand. Two minutes later and he lay upon the top of the bank, utterly exhausted, pallid as death, with Tom forcing a little brandy down his throat.

The spirit revived Hendrik, and he struggled to a sitting posture. He now only remembered the situation in which he had placed himself. What would he not have given to be out of it! He forced himself to say, in the barest whisper:

"Where—where are the others?"

Tom burst into a laugh.

"There are no others," he cried gaily. "I came back from Five Pools alone. Candidly, they laughed at me for my errand. It seems that Van Raas was arrested two days ago! That poor wretch who came to our hut wasn't Van Raas at all. The matter of the scar on his arm was just a coincidence; that, together with his looks, put us on a wrong scent."

Hendrik stared stupidly. The ground seemed to swim before his eyes. So he hadn't got the diamond at all! And he had perhaps killed an innocent man.

Tom went on cheerily.

"I can't say who the fellow was," he cried. "I went straight to the cabin on my return—— What's the matter?"

"Go on!" said Hendrik hoarsely.

"I went to the hut, but our visitor was not there. He had taken himself off, I suppose. But how you came to let him go, or what you were doing out here, is more than I can guess. I have been searching for you—— Hullo! Come, come, old fellow, this won't do at all!"

Hendrik Schloss tried to fight off the faintness that swept over him. He seemed to be sinking through a sea of blackness; then his senses left him.

He awoke forty-eight hours later, to find himself in the cabin, where Tom had managed to convey him. For the greater part of that time he had been delirious.

Tom asked no more questions, and Hendrik came to the conclusion that he had raved out enough of the truth during his spell of fever to enable his companion to form a pretty exact guess as to what had really happened during his absence. Tom spoke no word of reproach, evidently believing that the other had been sufficiently punished by what he had suffered. And for this silence Hendrik was deeply grateful.

As soon as he was able, he got out the mysterious packet he had wrenched from the stranger's fingers. The fragment of sheepskin contained a few coins—a miserable sum of money which the vagrant had gone to sleep clutching, as if he feared he might be robbed. And indeed, his fear had in a way been justified. Recovering from his knock, he had lost no time in making himself scarce.

Though Hendrik vowed to make ample restitution, he never heard any more of the stranger, or set eyes on him again.

FISH WITH A SAIL.

Few marine animals seem at first glance to betray less intelligence than the jellyfish. Up with the tide and down with the tide, carried along by this or that current, moving with the eddy of a backwater hither and thither, the jellyfish has become almost a synonym for helplessness.

Scientifically, of course, the popular idea of the jellyfish is wholly mistaken; but it is perhaps only in tropical waters that he is found in the perfection of intelligence. In the South Pacific, around the islands of Polynesia, and as far south as the upper portion of the North Island of New Zealand, there is a jellyfish who not only knows where he wants to go, but is even provided with a sail which he can and does hoist or lower at will. The sail, like the rest of this curious animal, is almost transparent, but, unlike the body of the fish, which is of the usual gelatinous construction, the sail is a membrane almost as hard as shell.

Roundabout the Ellice Group the navigating fish is often found with a sail measuring five inches across, and he navigates the shallow island waters with the skill of a Hoogily pilot, steering in and out of snaggy places and avoiding obstructions, both above and below the surface, with unerring skill. Like his cousins in home waters, this navigating jellyfish has the power of stinging its natural enemies, and its sting is fatal to fish and dangerous to man.

WHEN ANIMALS "TALK."

Silence is not absolutely necessary for the safety of wild animals, says a naturalist who recently spent some time in African forests. Wild animals are not so noisy and "talkative" as are those of domestic life; but, then, the wilder tribes of mankind are more taciturn than the civilized races. This is mainly due, in both cases, to the lack of social intimacy and nomadic habits. The carnivorous animals, the only natural cause of fear the other creatures have, depend mainly upon their sense of smell. They also hunt by night, seizing their prey while asleep.

The chimpanzee frequently breaks the forest's silence by answering the cries of other animals. The gorilla also will, on occasion, break out into a flood of speech, while other monkeys are persistent chatterers, and at almost any hour, too.

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